



Discovery Middle School

2025-2026

STUDENT HANDBOOK

School Colors

Teal and Black

School Mascot

Panther

Discovery Middle School: A place for innovation, excellence and discovery.

Welcome to Discovery Middle School! We are excited to have you as part of our DMS Family. We have put together this handbook as a help to you, and look forward to working with you this school year. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

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TO THE PARENT/GUARDIAN:

Welcome to Discovery and the 2025-2026 school year! It is a great time to be a DMS Panther! This student handbook is published so that all students and parents may have a ready reference to information that is necessary for an understanding of the daily operation of our school. It is essential that parents and students read the information contained therein so there may be as few misunderstandings as possible.

At Discovery we are committed to your child's educational excellence. We promote this through a diverse curriculum, a dedicated and knowledgeable staff and a school/community partnership. Collaboration, cooperation, and open communication between home and school are keys to building a strong foundation for a successful school year.

We look forward to another great year at Discovery Middle School: a place for innovation, excellence, and discovery. DMS Panther Pride is at an all-time high. We hope students use their time in middle school to cultivate both learning and friendships that will last a lifetime. Thank you for your cooperation and support! Go Panthers!

TO THE STUDENT:

On behalf of the faculty and staff of Discovery Middle School, we would like to welcome you to the school. Academic success and appropriate social skills are the foundation to your future success. Discovery Middle has the reputation of high academic achievement due to the dedication and efforts of our faculty and the diligence and perseverance of the student body. Organization is one of the necessary keys to success, and we want to provide you with every opportunity to succeed. Good luck in the upcoming school term!

It is the official policy of the Madison City school system that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, disability, sex, religion, national origin or age, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program, activity, or employment. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policies: Dr. Ed Nichols, 211 Celtic Dr. Madison, Alabama 35758, (256) 464-8370.

SCHOOL ARRIVAL

The official school day starts at 8:15 A.M. and ends at 3:20 P.M. Students will not be allowed in the school buildings until 7:40 A.M. as no doors will be unlocked until that time. Any student involved in activities prior to 7:40 AM should seek information/get a pass from the sponsor/teacher. Please adhere to this policy because the safety and supervision of students is one of our greatest concerns. Administrators and teachers officially assume their morning duty beginning at 7:40 A.M.

STUDENT ABSENCE PROCEDURES

Students, who are absent from school the entire day, must bring either a parent note stating the reason for the absence or a doctor's excuse. Absent notes should be submitted throughout Parent Square, within **3** days of the absence, or it will be **unexcused**. Board policy states that work cannot be made up for unexcused absences. Good attendance is encouraged and necessary for successful grade promotion. If a student's absences exceed 5 days in one semester, the student is required to bring a doctor's excuse for any additional days. This process starts over the second semester. A parent can write an excuse for a yearly total of 10 days (5 per semester). Requests to attend non-school educational activities must be presented to the principal, in writing, **prior** to the trip. The principal, at his/her discretion, will then decide if the activity will be an excused or unexcused absence based upon the State Department of Education's current School Attendance Manual.

*****Please see attached document: State of Alabama, Department of Education – Truancy Definition***

CHECKING IN/OUT PROCEDURES

Students, who arrive at school after the 8:15 bell, are tardy and must be signed into school **by the parent**. Students will only be allowed to sign themselves into school if they have a doctor's note. The student will then receive a pass to class marked either excused or unexcused. An excused tardy includes illness or a doctor's appointment. No more than three excused tardies per semester will be allowed unless a doctor's note or legal document is produced. **Oversleeping, missing the bus, or traffic problems are not an excused tardy.** Students may only be checked out during the day by a parent or guardian. Phone calls will **NOT** be accepted for checking out students. The student will be called from class upon the parent's arrival at school. Please arrive early in order to allow ample time for your child to arrive in the office to check out. If at all possible, students should be checked out at the beginning or end of a class block/period.

TARDY CONSEQUENCES

A student who is tardy for any class period during the school day will (first offense) receive a warning, (second offense) have points deducted from their ledger, (third offense) be assigned lunch detention with parent contact. All tardies to school after the third will result in administrative referral.

GRADES

Nine-week grades are a combination of daily class grades, quiz grades, test scores, assigned reports and projects and are an indication of how a student is doing at certain points during the school year. A student's semester grade will be an accumulation and combination of all grades throughout an eighteen-week period. Progress reports will be issued twice during a grading term (every three weeks). Parents can monitor their student's progress in each class by logging into the PowerSchool (PS) portal located on the school website.

MAKE-UP WORK

Under normal circumstances, it is expected that students will submit previously assigned work upon return to school after an excused absence. All work missed on the day(s) of excused absences must be made up within a timeframe determined by the teacher. **It is the responsibility of the student to ensure he or she makes up work following excused absences. Students will not receive credit for and will not be allowed to make up any assignments, tests, work, activities, etc., missed during unexcused absences.**

HALL PASS

Students must have a pass provided by the teacher to be out of class during the school day. Misuse of their pass will result in the loss of privileges and/or disciplinary measures.

RESTROOM USE

Students are encouraged to use the restroom between classes. Only in emergencies will a student be allowed to go to the restroom (color coded area) during instructional time. This is not only to protect instructional time, but is also for the safety of the student. If a student has a medical problem, please let the school nurse know immediately.

DRESS CODE

The Board believes that good grooming, dress, and personal appearance are essential elements in the learning and teaching process. Students are expected to dress and to be groomed in a manner that ensures their health and safety. Hair must be styled and colored in a manner that does not cause disruptions/distractions. Grooming, dress, and personal adornment, including considerations of personal hygiene, and general cleanliness, must not constitute a distraction or interfere with the educational opportunity of other students. Any holes that are above the allowed garment length must not show skin (leggings or shorts

must be worn underneath). Undergarments must not be exposed. Clothing that is too tight, short, or low cut will not be permitted. Shirts with a strap of less than 1.5”, halter tops, crop tops, or any other clothing pieces that show the midriff or bare back are not allowed. Leggings, jeggings, yoga pants, etc. can be worn with a shirt that reaches the top of the thigh, covering the bottom and private body areas. Images or wording on clothing must be school appropriate (i.e. no alcohol, drugs, weapons, violence, tobacco, or obscene references). **Blankets, stuffed animals, pajamas, and house slippers are not allowed. Any garment worn over leggings must be fingertip length. Clothing that is shorter than fingertip length will not be allowed.**

If students have a dress code infraction depending upon the severity of the infraction, students will be given a warning, the option to call home for alternative clothing, or the option to utilize clothing given by the administrator. Unless it is an extreme dress code infraction, the student will be sent back to class until a change of clothes is brought to school. The student will be placed in ISS if the student becomes defiant and refuses to change.

Parents may not be contacted if the dress code infraction is addressed as a warning or if it can be corrected immediately. Administration will notify parents if the dress code infraction is recurring, needs to be addressed with a change of clothes, or the student becomes defiant.

FIGHTING

Fighting or inciting a fight will not be tolerated at Discovery Middle School. Students involved in fighting or inciting either before/after school, during school, or at a school activity will receive the following consequences: suspended from school for 5 days, 15 day placement in the DMS Alternative School and 5 days ISS. Disciplinary hearings may be held. In addition, the student may be arrested. A parent conference will be required with an administrator before the student returns to school following suspension.

DRUGS/MEDICATION

Students are not to have **PRESCRIPTION** or **NON-PRESCRIPTION** medication in their possession on school premises, on school buses, or at school-sponsored events. Students are not allowed to transport **ANY** type of medication to or from the school. Parents must bring medications to the nurse. All medications will be dispensed in the nurse’s office. Examples of non-prescription medications include but are not limited to Tylenol, Midol, Motrin, Ibuprofen, Aleve, Sudafed, Claritin, Tylenol Sinus, etc. Students who are in possession of these types of items will be in violation of district policy and therefore subject to appropriate disciplinary procedures. Any student who has medication prescribed by a physician must leave it in the nurse’s office and a medication release form

must be filled out by the parent and attending physician and kept on file in the main office. Any student in possession of medication, who gives away, sells or attempts to sell medication (prescription or non-prescription) may be subject to suspension or expulsion. {Madison City Schools Policy JAJ, Section XX}

A student who possesses, uses, or is under the influence of any narcotic substance, alcoholic beverage, controlled drug (other than prescribed to student) or intoxicant of any kind while on the school grounds or at any school activity or event shall be referred for disciplinary action and referral made to law enforcement authorities.

TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Smoking and/or the use of tobacco products are prohibited in all school buildings and on any property owned and/or controlled by the Board of Education. Such prohibition also includes school-sponsored events. Any student found with tobacco or tobacco paraphernalia will be suspended from school for no less than three days and no more than five days. {Madison City Schools Policy GAN, April 6, 2000}

VAPING/E-CIGARETTES

If a student of Madison City Schools is caught vaping or with a vaping device on campus or at an extracurricular activity, will receive the following consequence: suspended from school for 5 days, 15 day placement in the DMS Alternative School and 5 days ISS for the first offense. A second offense and/or a positive drug test will result in a hearing and a more severe punishment which could include expulsion and a drug prevention program. Possession of e-cigarettes and other such devices are considered drug paraphernalia and are classified as a Class III violation.

IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION

In-School Suspension will be held daily during school hours. All students assigned I.S.S. must obey the teacher and rules at all times or will be subject to Out-Of-School Suspension or additional days of I.S.S. While in I.S.S. students will be required to complete all classwork and additional tasks such as community service and other writing assignments. **Students will be required to turn in their personal cellular device each day they are in I.S.S.**

PROFANITY

The use of improper or profane language in school and/or at school activities is prohibited. Offenders are immediately subject to disciplinary action. Anyone using profanity directed toward a staff member of Discovery will be suspended and could be subject to a disciplinary hearing.

CHEATING, PLAGIARISM, MAJOR FORGERY

A student who cheats will be subject to disciplinary consequences in Section XXII of the student code of conduct. Cheating is defined to include, but is not limited to: (a) copying someone else's work in or out of class and identifying and submitting it as your own, (b) failing to quote and/or list appropriate citations for material derived from published sources (including the Internet) and identifying and submitting it as your own, (c) the use of unauthorized notes, other materials, or assistance during the accomplishment of graded work in or out of class, (d) any other situation in which the student attempts to or accepts credit for work not his or her own.

THEFT

The acts of theft, damage of property, assault, possession of weapons, and harassment are violations of the law. Such behavior will result in immediate suspension and other disciplinary action as deemed appropriate by the administrator. Students participating in such types of behavior may be referred to appropriate law enforcement authorities.

FOCUS ACT

Under the FOCUS Act, effective July 1, 2025, the use, operation or possession of Wireless Communications Devices (including but not limited to cellular telephones, tablet computers, laptop computers, pagers, gaming devices, smartwatches, and earphones or headphones in school buildings or on school grounds during the Instructional Day, except as permitted under exceptions included in Policy 6.20 and in Topic 1.23 of the MCS Code of Conduct, is prohibited. Violation of Board policy with respect to such use, operation, or possession of Wireless Communication Devices may constitute a Class III violation as set out in Topic 1.23.

FIELD TRIPS

It is a privilege, not a requirement, for students to participate in DMS field trips. Therefore, any student that has been placed in out-of-school suspension (O.S.S.) will not be allowed to attend field trips for the remainder of the school year. Furthermore, any student that has been placed in I.S.S. multiple times (more than once) will be prohibited from attending field trips. Any money that a student has contributed toward a field trip will be forfeited and no refunds will be issued if that student is suspended and not allowed to attend.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

Matches, lighters, laser devices are prohibited and constitute a Class II offense. Dice or other gambling devices are not allowed at school. **Any misuse of electronic devices will result in appropriate disciplinary consequences. Misuse is behavior such as texting, video recording students/DMS staff members, or posting inappropriate**

pictures/comments to social networking sites which cause disruption at school. These items will be confiscated and appropriate consequences will be administered. The school is not responsible for the loss or theft of prohibited items or electronic devices.

BUS RULES

Safety on school buses is essential and it starts with good behavior from students. Students are to ride their assigned buses unless given express written permission from a parent/guardian to ride a different bus, requiring principal approval and a copy given to the bus driver. Students will have to ride their assigned bus to or from school. **You must ride the bus assigned to your route.** If you cannot ride that assigned bus, you must make alternate plans for transportation. Riding the bus is a privilege that can be taken away if a student disregards rules. Listed below are rules for proper bus conduct:

- Remain seated at all times while the bus is in motion.
- Use appropriate tone of voice and language at all times.
- Obey the driver at all times.
- Be respectful of the driver and other students.
- Food or beverage is not allowed on the bus.
- Keep hands, feet, and all other objects to yourself.
- Throwing objects from the bus will result in an immediate bus suspension.

See the Madison City Board of Education Code of Conduct for additional rules.

PARENT / TEACHER CONFERENCES

The use of parent/teacher conferences and communication is encouraged. Parent/teacher conferences should be coordinated by calling or emailing the appropriate teacher. More communication between parents and teachers contributes to the better understanding of the student's needs. If requested, a member of the administrative staff will sit in on a conference.

VISITORS AND/OR PARENTS

All parents and visitors must sign in at the main office. Please use the front entrance to enter and exit the building. Picture ID is required to check out a student. You will be issued a visitor's pass to wear while you are in the building. Any unauthorized person in the building will be considered a trespasser and must go to the main office to sign in or leave the premises.

LUNCH

Students are expected to act appropriately during lunch. Lunch detention will be assigned as needed. Students will be assigned to a lunch table. Students must remain seated during lunch and remain with their teacher to and from the cafeteria. There will be **no visitors allowed** in the lunchroom during the lunch period. All students are required to clean up after themselves once lunch is finished. No commercial food deliveries are allowed i.e. McDonalds', Chick fil A, etc.

DRIVING

No student will be allowed to drive an automobile, motorcycle, or any other motorized vehicle on Discovery's campus. Please be aware that this is strictly enforced by the Administration. All unauthorized vehicles will be towed by DMS administration at the owner's expense.

STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TRUANCY DEFINITION

A parent, guardian, or other person having charge of any child officially enrolled in Alabama public schools (K-12) shall explain in writing the cause of any and every absence of the child no later than three (3) school days following return to school. A failure to furnish such explanation shall be evidence of the child being truant for any absence determined by the principal to be unexcused based upon the State Department of Education's current School Attendance Manual. Seven unexcused absences within a school year constitute a student being truant for the purpose of filing a petition with the Court. The Interagency committee on Youth Truancy Task Force recommendations known as the Early Warning Truancy Prevention Program timeline for reporting truancy shall define the truancy status of any student as follows:

1. First truancy/unexcused absence (warning)
 - (i) Parent/guardian shall be notified by the school principal or his/her designee that the student was truant and the date of the truancy.
 - (ii) Parent/guardian shall also be provided with a copy of Alabama's compulsory school attendance laws and advised of the penalties that can be applied and the procedures that shall be followed in the event that other unexcused absences occur.
2. No earlier than the fifth unexcused absence (conference)
 - (i) The parent, guardian, or person having control with the attendance officer and principal or his/her designee and/or participate in the early warning program provided by the juvenile court.
 - (ii) Attendance at one of these conferences shall be mandatory except where prior arrangements have been made or an emergency exists.
 - (iii) Failure to appear at the school conference and/or to appear at the early warning program shall result in the filing of a complaint/petition against the parent under

Code of Alabama (1975), S16-28-12(c) (failure to cooperate) or truancy against the child, whichever is appropriate. No earlier than seven unexcused absences, but within ten (10) school days (court)

- (iv) File complaint/petition against the child and/or parent/guardian, if appropriate.

3. Child under probation

- (i) The school attendance officer should be notified by the juvenile probation officer of all children in the school system under probation supervision by the juvenile court as consistent with state stature, *Code of Alabama (1975) S12-15-100 and 105*
- (ii) Where a child under probation is truant, the school attendance officer should immediately notify the juvenile probation officer.
- (iii) Where a child under probation is truant, the school attendance officer should immediately notify the juvenile probation officer.

SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973

“No otherwise qualified individual with handicaps in the United States shall, solely by reason of her or his handicap, as defined in section 706 (8) of this title, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service.” (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794)