



James McHenry Elementary School

Thomas Rivers, Principal | thomas.rivers@pgcps.org
8909 McHenry Lane | Lanham, MD 20706 | (301) 918-8760 |
www.pgcps.org/jamesmchenry

August 5, 2026

Dear James McHenry Elementary Families,

Welcome to the **2026–2027 school year!** I hope you and your family enjoyed a safe, relaxing, and memorable summer. It is my pleasure to welcome both our returning and new families to another exciting year at James McHenry Elementary School. We are grateful that you have entrusted us with your child's education, and we look forward to partnering with you to ensure every student has an outstanding school year.

Last year, our school community made great progress. Together, we improved student attendance, strengthened our school culture, celebrated student success, and continued building a positive learning environment where every child is valued and supported. While we are proud of our accomplishments, we know our work is far from complete. This year, we are approaching our work with renewed purpose, urgency, and an unwavering commitment to academic excellence.

Our theme for the 2026–2027 school year is: **"Level Up to Excellence: Learning Without Limits."**

This theme represents our belief that **every child can achieve at high levels when provided with exceptional instruction, meaningful support, and limitless opportunities to learn.** "Level Up" means continuously improving—not settling for where we are today, but striving to become better tomorrow. It means challenging ourselves to think critically, persevere through difficult tasks, celebrate growth, and maintain high expectations for every student.

Learning Without Limits reflects our commitment to ensuring that no child's success is determined by language, disability, income, or circumstance. Every student deserves access to rigorous instruction, caring educators, and opportunities to reach their fullest potential.

Our goal this year is simple:

Every student. Every classroom. Every day. Excellence without limits.

James McHenry Elementary School has been identified by the Maryland State Department of Education as a **Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI)** school because several student groups—including our **Hispanic students, Multilingual Learners, Students with Disabilities, and Economically Disadvantaged**



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students—did not meet the state's academic performance targets in English Language Arts and Mathematics.

While this designation is important, **it does not define who we are as a school, nor does it define the potential of our students.** Instead, it provides us with an opportunity to closely examine our data, identify areas for growth, and implement focused strategies that will improve outcomes for every learner.

Our dedicated teachers, staff, and leadership team remain fully committed to ensuring that every child receives the high-quality education they deserve. We view this designation as a call to action—not a setback—and we are confident that through strong instruction, intentional planning, and partnership with families, our students will continue to grow and succeed.

This year we will:

- **Strengthen Tier I instruction** by providing rigorous, standards-based lessons, differentiated instruction, and engaging learning experiences in every classroom every day.
- **Use student data to guide instruction** by regularly monitoring student progress, identifying learning needs early, and providing timely interventions through our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
- **Provide targeted support for identified student groups** through specialized instruction, language development, intervention programs, inclusive instructional practices, and additional academic supports.
- **Invest in teacher learning and instructional coaching** so our educators continue to strengthen their instructional practices and provide every student with high-quality teaching and learning experiences.

One of the greatest predictors of student success is **consistent school attendance**.

Last year, our school made significant gains in improving student attendance, and we sincerely thank our families for helping us achieve this progress. However, we must continue this positive momentum.

Every day a student is absent is a missed opportunity to participate in high-quality Tier I instruction, engage with classmates, receive immediate feedback from teachers, and build the knowledge and skills necessary for academic success.



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We ask every family to make attendance a priority by ensuring that students arrive **on time, every day, ready to learn**. Together, we can ensure every child receives the full benefit of our instructional program.

Your partnership makes an incredible difference in your child's success.

Research consistently shows that students achieve at higher levels when schools and families work together. We encourage every family to:

- Ensure your child attends school every day and arrives on time.
- Read with your child and encourage learning at home.
- Monitor homework and academic progress.
- Maintain regular communication with your child's teacher.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences, family engagement events, curriculum nights, and academic workshops.
- Participate in our family engagement sessions where you will learn practical strategies to support reading, mathematics, and learning at home.

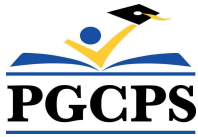
Together, we can create a strong partnership that empowers every child to succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

As we begin another exciting school year, I am filled with optimism about what we will accomplish together. The success of our students depends on the strength of our partnership with families, staff, and the community. By working together, maintaining high expectations, and remaining focused on excellence, I am confident that our students will continue to thrive.

Thank you for your continued trust, partnership, and support of James McHenry Elementary School. I look forward to seeing each of you as we begin an incredible school year.

Together, we will **Level Up to Excellence** and ensure **Learning Without Limits** for every James McHenry Cougar.

With Cougar Pride,
Mr. Rivers, Principal
Mr. Rivers, Principal



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Parent Information

Staffing Updates

I am excited to welcome the newest members of the James McHenry Elementary School family. Please join me in welcoming:

- **Aaryn Godby** – Third Grade Reading and Social Studies Teacher
- **Faith Johnson** – Special Education Teacher
- **Xander Jude De Los Santos** – Kindergarten Teacher
- **Jair Ellis** – Physical Education Teacher
- **Harolyn Slaughter** – Math Resource Teacher
- **Xavier Herron** – Paraprofessional
- **Brandi McIntyre** – Professional School Counselor
- **Jamaal Peterman** – Art Teacher

Immunizations

All students must have up-to-date immunizations on file with the school to return. If immunizations are not up to date your child will not be allowed to attend school. Free Back-to-School Immunizations are provided by the Cheverly Health Center [link](#). Should you have questions regarding your child's immunization record, please contact the Health Services at 301-749-4722 or by email at health.services@pgcps.org.

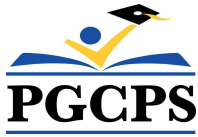
School Office Hours

The school office hours are from **7:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.** If you are in need of assistance you must schedule an appointment for support. To schedule an appointment please call (301) 918-8760 or email Gwendolyn Steele at gwendolyn.steele@pgcps.org. **Per PGCPS policy, all visitors must ring the doorbell and show their identification to the camera to gain access into the school building. Visitors will not be allowed in the building if an appointment is not scheduled.**

School Hours

It is essential that students arrive at school on time each day to engage in instruction. School promptly begins at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 1:45 p.m. Students will be allowed to enter the building at 7:15 am.

Before that time, there is no adult supervision for students. To receive the full benefit of the instructional program it is important to be present and on time every day. **All students that arrive at school after 7:30**



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a.m. are tardy. Classroom Schedules will be provided specific to respective classes during Orientation and Back-to-School Night sessions.

Afternoon Dismissal

It is important that the dismissal process be as smooth as possible. As such, the early dismissal cut-off is at 1:00 p.m. Following 1:00 p.m. parents must wait for their children to be dismissed at the regular time of 1:45 p.m. Emergency exceptions will be considered as needed. Ensuring the safety of our students is a top priority and it is imperative that we know the intended dismissal procedure for each student. Dismissal information will be shared during orientation and Back-to-School Night sessions.

Early Dismissal

There is NO early dismissal after 1:00 pm. There will be no exceptions, so please make appointments before this time or after the 1:45 pm bell. If your child needs to leave early before 1:00 pm, please send a note to school so that the teacher can prepare them for early dismissal. Also, for safety reasons every person must show an ID at the door. This will alleviate your wait time.

Class Assignments

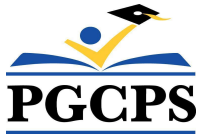
It is kindly asked that parents/guardians model positive actions when sharing class assignments with their children. The determination of student class assignments are a result of an intentional and thoughtful process, hence; changes to class lists are not made once released. Parents can also check your child's assigned teacher using [Parent Vue](#). Classroom assignments will also be available at our JMES Community Day on Saturday, August 22, 2026 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm.

Parent Vue

Synergy has replaced SchoolMAX as the student information system for Prince George's County Public Schools. Families will now use ParentVUE, to access important information about their students. ParentVUE is the portal that allows parents and guardians to view information about their student, including classroom assignments and scores, attendance, transcripts, graduation status and more. In ParentVUE, families can also update their phone numbers and emergency contact information and access the Online Registration (OLR) Application. **All report cards will only be accessible through Parent Vue. If you have not registered, use this link: [Parent Vue](#)**

School Meals

The federal waiver that provided free lunch for all students during the Pandemic has expired. Breakfast will remain FREE for all students. The cost for lunch is now \$3, however; there is no cost to students who



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are eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals. All families are encouraged to APPLY each year for Free and Reduced Price Meals by visiting [Apply for Free and Reduced Priced Meals](#). If you need assistance completing this form please contact Jessica Mayers-Williams (jess.mayerswilliams@pgcps.org) at (301-918-8760) to schedule an appointment.

SURVEY COMPLETION IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. Responses also determine eligibility for school funding.

To apply you will need:

- the name, school, and grade of your school-age children;
- the names of all adults living in the home;
- income information for all adults living in the home; and
- student ID numbers for your school-age children.

MySchoolBucks is an online payment service through which parents can securely pay for meals and monitor student cafeteria purchases. Meal payments can be made online by visiting: <https://www.myschoolbucks.com/ver2/getmain?requestAction=home>.

View lunch menus by visiting:

<https://schools.mealviewer.com/district/princegeorgescounty>.

Emergency Contact Form

Emergency Contact forms will be sent home with students on the first day of school. It is important that you complete the form to its entirety with correct information and contact numbers. After completing the form please return to your child's teacher.

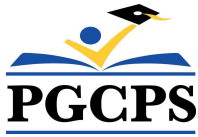
Parent Communication

At James McHenry Elementary School, we value Parents as our Partners and prioritize keeping all informed. As such, the following platforms will be utilized to communicate with families; Google Classroom, Class Dojo, Email, School Website, School Messenger, and Twitter:

- [Class Dojo](#)

Class Dojo is a platform that allows educators to communicate with families remotely, through the sharing of photos, videos, and messages. The school Class Dojo account houses an account for all teachers and enables the school community to remain connected. Teachers will provide invitations for parents to join. It is important that all parents join Class Dojo.

- [Email](#)



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Emails will be shared with families throughout the course of the school year as a means to ensure that all remain informed.

- [SchoolMessenger](#)

School Messenger is replacing GovDelivery, which was the notification system previously used to send PGCPS emails, text messages, and newsletters. To sign up to receive messages from PGCPS please click [here](#) or visit: <https://www.pgcps.org/offices/newsroom/schoolmessenger>.

- [X](#)

Twitter is a social networking service. It is highly encouraged for parents to subscribe to Twitter as a way to receive district-wide and school-wide updates. Follow us [@JMESCougarPRIDE](#) on X.

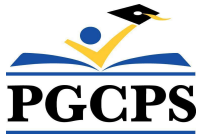
- [2025-2026 Student Publicity Release Form | James McHenry](#)

Throughout the school year, activities will be conducted that may be publicized by local or national news media or used to promote the school system. To obtain permission from parents/guardians to capture their student(s) name, voice, photographic likeness and student work to be used by the school and/or Board of Education, supply the form template to your families.

Please complete the Student Publicity Form [Click Here](#).

[Important Dates](#)

Event	Date	Time
JMES Community Day Join us for Food, Fellowship, and Fun. We will also provide backpacks and supplies for our students	Saturday, August 22, 2026	9:00 am to 1:00 pm
Mock Day/Orientation (In-Person) (Pre-Kindergarten , Kindergarten)	Monday, August 24, 2026	Pre K 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. Kindergarten 9:45 a.m.- 10:45 a.m.
Supply Drop Off "Greet and Go" Visit JMES Cougars are invited to the school to meet their teachers and drop off school supplies. This event is only for James McHenry Elementary students and parents.		



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Supply Drop Off "Greet & Go" Visit	Monday, August 24, 2026	1st - 2nd Grade 9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. 3rd - 5th Grade 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
First Day of School	Tuesday, August 25th	All Day
Back to School Night (Primary Students - Grades PK - 2)	Tuesday, September 15th	5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Back to School Night (Intermediate Students - Grades 3 - 5)	Thursday, September 17th	5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Rosh Hashanah	September 12th	All Day
Professional Development for Teachers	September 16th	All Day
Yom Kippur Schools and Offices Closed	September 21st	3 Hour Early Dismissal
Early Dismissal for Students Teacher ½ day	October 2nd	All Day
Professional Development Schools Closed for Students	October 16th	All Day
End of First Quarter	October 30th	