# AKF BEAR BULLETIN

Elementary News 9.11.26

## From the Principal's Den

Dear AKF Families,
We are off to a wonderful start to the school year! Our students have settled into their classrooms, built new routines and launched all of our curriculum in all of our classrooms. It has been wonderful to see our Bears learning, growing, and getting to know one another!

As we begin the year together, we want to take a moment to remind families about some of the school procedures we have in place to help us navigate some of the trickier topics that can come up during the school year. Please take a few minutes to review and save this newsletter article for future reference. We hope it can serve as a handy resource if questions come up throughout the year and you don't have immediate access to the Student Handbook.

Thank you for partnering with us as we work together to make AKF a safe, welcoming, and joyful place for every child. We are so glad to begin another year of learning and growing with our AKF families!
Warmly,
Anne Duke
Principal
aduke@akfcs.org

# Bear Necessities and Upcoming Dates

### September Dates

- September 16th PTO meeting in person virtual option offered too) 6pm at school
- September 22nd- Open House for Grades 1-3 5-6:30pm
- September 23rd- Early Dismissal ( Professional Development for Teachers)
- September 25- Goodies with Grown Ups 7:45am
- September 30th School Picture Day

## Attendance Matters

Regular school attendance matters. For our youngest learners, every day at school is an opportunity to learn, build friendships, develop routines, and feel connected to their school community. We know that families sometimes face challenges that make getting to school difficult, and our goal is always to partner with families and provide support so students can attend school regularly and arrive ready to learn.

Being at school every day is important, and being on time matters just as much. The beginning of the school day is when students unpack, connect with their classmates and teacher, participate in morning routines, and prepare for the day's learning. When students arrive late, they miss important instruction and routines and may have a harder time getting settled and ready to learn.
We ask families to make every effort to have students at school and ready to begin the day on time. Repeated late arrivals are also considered when we monitor attendance. A pattern of tardiness can result in a student missing significant instructional time and may contribute to concerns regarding chronic absenteeism or truancy. Just as we do with absences, we will reach out to families when we see a pattern of late arrivals and work with you to create a plan for improving punctuality.

**Our Attendance Support Process**
Massachusetts law requires school-aged children to attend school, and schools are required to address chronic absenteeism and truancy. (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 119, Section 21)
At AKF Elementary, we follow a progressive attendance process designed to keep families informed, offer support, and help students get to school consistently and on time.
**5 Absences — A Reminder**
When a student reaches five absences, families will receive a reminder letter letting you know the total number of absences recorded. This is an opportunity to check in and make sure we are on the same page about your child's attendance.

**10 Absences — 2nd Reminder and Attendance Support Plan**
At ten absences, a member of our counseling team will contact you to discuss your child's attendance and work with you to develop an **attendance support plan**. Together, we will identify any barriers to regular attendance and consider ways the school can help.
**15 Absences — Dean of Students Conference**
At fifteen absences, our Dean of Students will reach out to schedule a conference with your family. During this conversation, we will review the attendance support plan, discuss additional supports, and explain the next steps in our chronic absenteeism process.
**18 Absences — Family Support Referral**
At eighteen absences, AKF will make a referral to the **Department of Children and Families (DCF)** for additional family support, consistent with our legal responsibilities. Our goal is to connect families with resources that can help address barriers to consistent school attendance.
**Continued Absences — Court Process**
If absences continue despite our efforts to support improved attendance, AKF may proceed with the appropriate court process related to chronic absenteeism and truancy. Massachusetts law permits a school district to seek assistance through the court when a student is habitually truant.

Please know that an attendance conversation is not about blame—it is about partnership. If your family is experiencing circumstances that are making regular attendance or arriving on time difficult, please reach out to us. The earlier we know about a concern, the sooner we can work together to identify supports.

Thank you for helping us make regular attendance and punctuality a priority. Every day at AKF matters, every minute of learning counts, and every student deserves the opportunity to start the day with their classmates and teacher.

## Reminders for Dismissal

**Reminders for After-School Dismissal & Pick-Up**
We love learning and growing with your kids every day, and helping them get home safely at the end of the day is our top priority!
Please keep these important pick-up guidelines in mind:

- **Timely Pick-Up:** Parents and guardians are responsible for ensuring students are picked up on time from school, bus stops, and after-school activities. The elementary school pick up line begins at 3:15pm and ends at 3:30pm.
- **Late Pick-Up Policy:** A late fee of $1.00 per minute per child applies for any pick-ups past the established dismissal time (3:30pm) and families will receive a invoice the following day.
- **Safety Protocols:** If a parent or guardian cannot be reached within 1.5 hours after dismissal, school staff are legally required to notify the Worcester Police Department and file a report with the state (MGL c. 119 § 51A) to ensure the child's welfare.

**Bus Safety & Drop-Off Policy (Grades K–3)**
To ensure our youngest learners arrive home safely, please review these key bus guidelines for students in grades K–3:

- **Adult Required at Drop-Off:** Students in grades K–3 will not be left at a bus stop without a parent, guardian, or designated responsible adult present. If no one is there to meet them, the bus driver will safely return your child to the school.

- **Return Fee:** A **$25 fee per child** is charged each time a student is returned to the school. This fee must be paid to maintain bus privileges.
- **Bus Privilege Limit:** To keep routes running on schedule and ensure child safety, students returned to the school **more than three times** during the school year will lose their bus privileges for the remainder of the year.

Thank you for helping us make sure every child gets home safe and sound every afternoon!

---

### A Note from our Dean of Students regarding Bullying

Creating a safe, supportive environment for our students takes a team effort between home and school. To help spark helpful conversations at home, here is a quick guide on how we distinguish between daily conflict and bullying behavior:

- **What Bullying IS:**
  - **Targeted and Repeated:** Unwanted, aggressive behavior that happens repeatedly over time (or has the strong potential to be repeated).
  - **Power Imbalance:** Involves a real or perceived imbalance of power, such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity.
  - **Intentional:** Done purposefully to cause physical, emotional, or social harm. Examples include deliberate exclusion, rumors, physical harm, or repeated mean messages online.
- **What Bullying IS NOT:**
  - **A Single Disagreement:** A one-time argument, accidental physical contact, or a rude comment made in the heat of the moment during play.
  - **Mutual Conflict:** A disagreement where both students have equal power and are actively arguing back and forth.
  - **Teasing Among Friends:** Lighthearted, playful teasing between close friends where both kids are laughing and no one is being hurt.

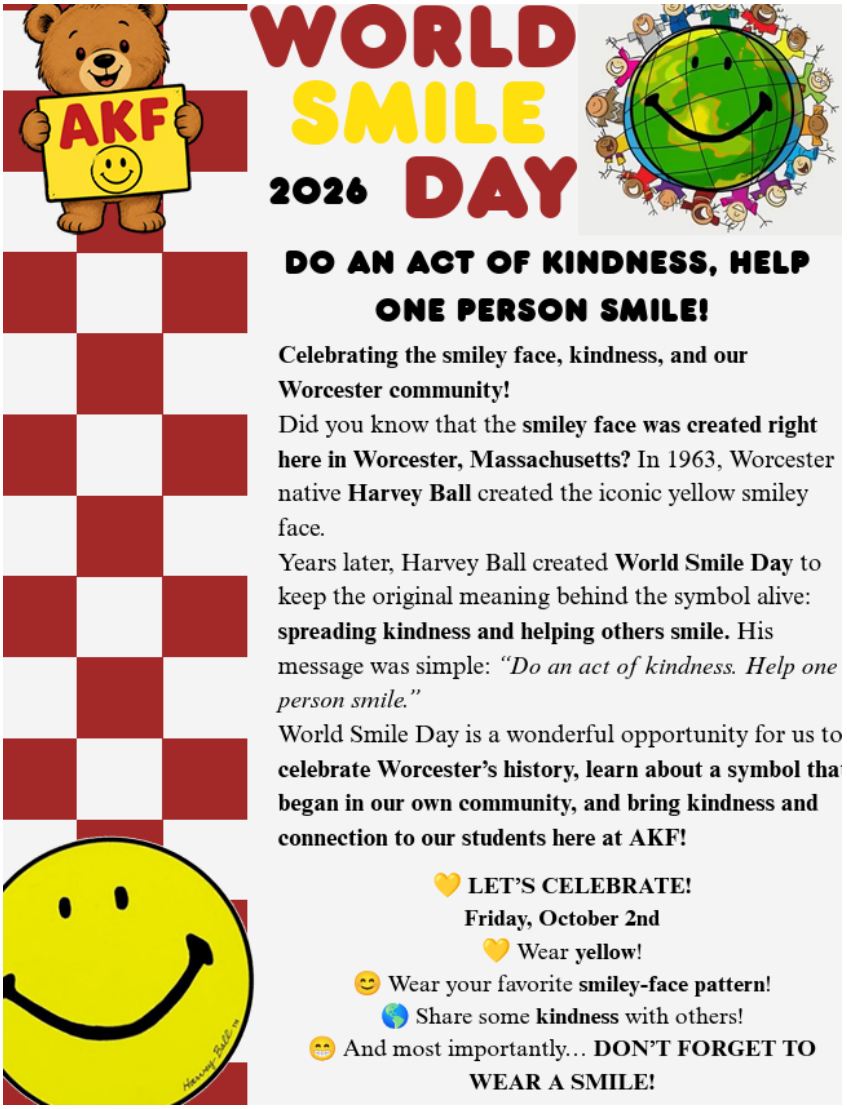
While conflict and mean behaviors are still addressed by staff to help students learn positive social skills, identifying true bullying helps us take the right legal and disciplinary actions to protect every child.

---

## Open House for Grades 1-3

We are excited to welcome our Grades 1–3 families to Open House! This is a wonderful opportunity to visit your child's classroom, meet their teacher, see where they learn each day, and get a glimpse into what school is all about for the 2026–2027 school year. Teachers will share what students will be learning, how their classroom communities are built, and what families can expect throughout the year.

We hope you'll join us as we celebrate the start of a new school year and invite families into our learning community. We can't wait to see you!




## Goodies with Grown Ups

We invite students and their grownups to start the last Friday of each month with a little treat, a little creativity, and lots of connection. On the last Friday of each month, families can pull into the drop-off line and head into the cafeteria to enjoy a donut treat and a small craft together before the school day begins. Our first Goodies with Grownups will be Friday, September 25, from 7:45–8:15 AM. We can't wait to welcome our AKF families for some morning fun!

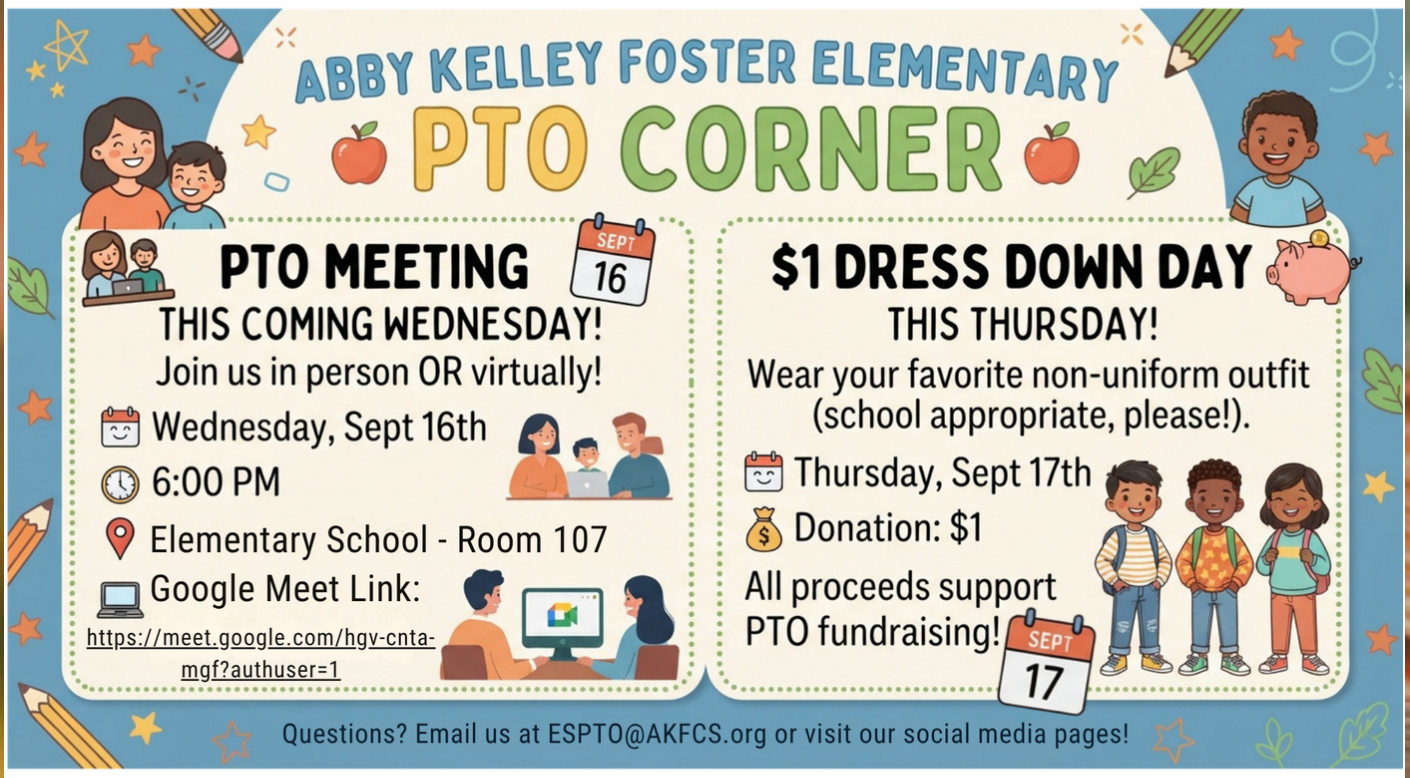
## AKF Elementary SCHOOL PTO

**PTO CORNER**

Join us this coming Wednesday, September 16th at 6:00 PM for our monthly PTO meeting, held in person at room 107 in the elementary school or virtually via the Google Meet link:

**Video call link:** https://meet.google.com/hgv-cnta-mgf
**Or dial: (US)** +1 901-609-6981 **PIN: 280 786 137#**
**More phone numbers:** https://tel.meet/hgv-cnta-mgf?pin=8887345598506

Don't forget our $1 Dress Down Day this Thursday, September 17th—students can wear school-appropriate non-uniform outfits by dropping their $1 donation into the collection envelope in their classroom to support PTO fundraising!




## DISTRICT NEWS

We're excited to invite our AKF staff and families to join us for Worcester Railers Opening Weekend!

**AKF Chorus Performance**

Members of our middle school and high school chorus will be singing "God Bless America" during the game. We are so excited for our students to be part of this special experience!

**High-Five Tunnel Experience**

K–12 students who are attending the game and are not members of the chorus will have the

opportunity to participate in a high-five tunnel! Students will get to high-five the players as they walk out onto the ice!

**Get Your Tickets!**

If your family would like to attend, please purchase tickets using the QR code on the attached flyer.

**Ticket purchases close Saturday, October 3rd.**

A
**Anne Duke**
Anne is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters