



Parent Handbook 2024-2025

Pathfinders Nature Mentoring
drew@pathfindersnature.com
www.pathfindersnature.com

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Part I—Flow of the Day

Location

The drop-off and pick-up location is at the **Magic Forest in Rinconada Park**, located at **1400 Hopkins Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94303**.

Throughout the year, Pathfinders visits many local parks and nature preserves that are a 20-minute driving distance from downtown Palo Alto. The program will occasionally venture further for special field trip days.

Locations are announced in the lead teacher's weekly update emails, but are subject to change due to unpredictable park conditions and/or changes in weather forecast.

Program Hours

Program hours are 9:00am-1:30pm, when operating.

Prior to 8:55am and after 1:35pm, teachers are unavailable, due to their daily staff prep and debrief meetings.

Pick up and Drop off

A timely arrival, for pick up and drop off, will maximize your child's time and experience in nature. In addition, timeliness supports your child's transition to and from the program.

Pathfinders asks that parents/guardians uphold a **no cellphone use** period during the drop-off and pick-up transitions. This is a time to be present for and connect with your child as you support them in this important developmental task.

If an adult, unknown to Pathfinders, is picking up your child, inform the lead teacher prior to pick up. Provide the person's name and a description, so that the teachers can safely transition your child to a known adult.

Arrival

Drop-off is at 9:00am. We suggest arriving 5 minutes early to support a smooth transition and encourage 1:1 nature exploration for you and your child.

Beginning at 9:05am, Teachers will lead the group in the welcome song, “Funga Alafia”; parent participation is encouraged.

After, the group will say goodbye to parents/guardians and begin their transition into the vans. Vans depart at 9:15am.

Departure

Pick up is at 1:30pm. Teachers are available for brief check ins between 1:30-1:40pm. After 1:40pm, teachers are no longer available for check ins. Please plan to arrive by 1:25pm so you are there to greet us once we have returned.

Lateness

If you are running late for drop off or pick up, message the lead teacher with your ETA.

Late arrivals will be penalized by \$10 after 1:35pm and an additional \$15 for every 10 minutes after 1:45pm.

Vans

Pathfinders requests that parents/guardians do not help with the loading/unloading of children and their belongings to/from the vans.

When the vans arrive for pick up, Pathfinders requests that parents/guardians do not approach the vans and wait in the redwoods. This supports a safe and smooth transition, for the children and their belongings, from the vans and to their adult.

A Day at Pathfinders

Pathfinders emphasizes child-led play and learning that's rooted in nature connection, supported by a structured and dependable daily rhythm. This rhythm supports the child's sense of safety and security, allowing them to relax and explore.

Here is a brief outline of a typical day at Pathfinders:

9:00am – Meet at the Magic Forest

9:05am—Welcome Circle, the group sings our welcoming song “Funga Alafia”.

9:10am–9:20a - Say goodbye to parents/guardians, load into vans and depart

9:35am-9:45am – Arrive at nature location. Complete safety checks, and time for exploration and play

10:00am-10:20am – Snack and Story Circle – This circle is core to the routine of the day. Children enjoy their zero-waste snacks while teachers discuss jobs for the day, facilitate group conversations, and orient the group to the park. The teachers tell an oral story or read a book related to nature awareness, friendship, discovery, peacemaking, and other topics.

10:20am-11:50am – Play and Discovery time

11:50am-12:20pm – Lunch Circle

12:20pm-12:45pm - Additional play time

12:45am-1:00pm – Pack up and participate in the Closing Gratitude Circle. Children will share their “thank you” for the day and we sing the closing song.

1:00pm-1:05pm – Load into vans for the return to Magic Forest

1:25pm-1:30pm — Arrive at Magic Forest, unload from vans, and transition to parent/guardian. Teachers are available for a brief check in

Part II—Pathfinders Preparation

What to Bring

It is vital that your child is appropriately prepared for their adventures and time in the outdoors. Below is a list of items that can support your child's play and learning during their time at Pathfinders. For specific recommendations, refer to the "Pathfinders Gear Guide".

- **Child sized backpack with sternum/chest clip**—a sternum clip is critical, as it supports the child in the weight distribution of their pack. Regular school bags are not adequate for forest school, as they are not structurally supportive for carrying weight, walking distances or durable to outdoor conditions
- **Minimum of one full 16oz water bottle**—do not pack milk, soda, or other sugary beverages
- **A well-rounded, trash free snack**—a snack that can fuel your child's body for their adventures, prior to lunch
- **a trash free lunch**—pack items that are easy to eat outdoors on the ground and are packaged in child-friendly containers
- **A change of clothes in a waterproof bag and an extra bag for dirty clothes**—a complete change of clothes (socks, underwear, top and bottoms) are necessary. refill when the spares are used.
- **Any necessary medications or emergency items specific to your child**—we are often more than 10 minutes away from emergency or medical locations. It is imperative that you send your child with any necessary items for the medical needs
- **Seasonally appropriate attire**—Check the weather for the day and ensure your child is properly dressed. Layers are always a good idea. See the "Clothing" section for specific information

What Not to Bring

Pathfinders enjoys the unique and fascinating surroundings of the natural world. Special items distract the children from the natural world and become the focus of their attention.

Here is a list of items to **not** bring:

- **Toys**
- **Electronic devices**—if your child needs to carry an electronic device for safety reasons, inform the lead teacher so that they can make a suitable arrangement
- **Valuables** (i.e. jewelry, trinkets, family heirlooms, etc.)
- **Keepsakes** (i.e. gifts, treasures, memorabilia, etc.)
- ****Comfort stuffed item/lovey**
- **Books**—if your child wants to bring a special book, inform a teacher in advance so that they can preview the book and brainstorm ways to incorporate it into the day’s curriculum

**A comfort item is allowed in van rides, but it will remain in the van for the day’s adventures

Pathfinders is not responsible for any lost or damaged items.

Clothing

Children enjoy a day full of exploration in nature. A large part of their exploration is done through their physical bodies—climbing trees, playing in mud, crawling in brush, playing with sticks, splashing in puddles, etc. Proper attire can protect children from the weather and adds a layer of protection during their exploration.

Pathfinders does not recommend children wearing special clothing items that are meaningful to them as children can become upset if these clothing items get dirty or destroyed.

Pathfinders recommends having “Pathfinders only” clothing that are worn specifically for the program and are items the child doesn’t mind getting dirty. Although Pathfinders recommends technical outdoor gear, it is not a requirement.

Below is a chart of technical gear recommendations and a list of alternatives. Technical gear is preferred because of its durability, weather resistance and protective qualities.

Clothing Type	Technical Gear	Alternative
Shoes *Everyday use*	Hiking boots or shoes with a tread —supportive for hikes, climbing in trees and navigating loose dirt / forest floor debris	Closed-toe shoes with grip on the bottom —grip reduces slipping and supports tree climbing
Socks *Everyday use*	Wool/wool-synthetic socks —If wet, wool socks will still keep feet warm. Very important during rainy season	Cotton Socks —ensure extra pairs are packed in the event socks are wet
Bottoms *Everyday use*	Children’s sized hiking pants —durable, moisture wicking, tear resistant, flexible, allows for free range of motion and skin protection from sun, ticks, poison oak, scrapes	Cotton leggings, jeans, pants —full coverage of the leg to provide skin protection Discourage shorts as they provide little to no skin protection
Tops *Everyday use*	Lightweight cotton long sleeves, t-shirts, sun shirts —breathable, light and provides sun protection *dresses —dresses are acceptable, but strongly discourage tutus as they can get caught in branches	N/A
Sun Hat *Everyday use*	Full Brim Hat —protects face and neck from sun exposure	Billed Hat — “baseball cap”, provides some face sun protection
Warm Clothing	Wool Base Layers/ Long Underwear (top and bottom) — during cold days, these help keep children warm. Flexible and breathable, moisture wicking. These are worn underneath regular clothing	Any base layers/ Long Underwear —still supports in keeping child warm, but not as breathable or moisture wicking
Sweaters/Jackets	Merino Wool or Synthetic Fleece —can stay warm even when wet Down Jacket —can stay warm even when wet	Cotton Sweaters — provides warmth
Warm Hat	“Beanie” —provides warmth during cold months/mornings, even when damp	N/A

Rain Gear

Ensure your child has a **rain jacket**, **rain pants**, and **rain boots**. The quality of rain gear varies greatly, and proper rain gear can make a difference between a child having a very fun rainy day or a very uncomfortable wet day.

Pathfinders highly recommends Outdoor School Shop
<https://outdoorschoolshop.com>

Hazards

Dehydration—Pathfinders is a very active outdoor based program. It is important that your child is prepared with enough water for the day. We suggest drinking plenty of water at home, prior to drop off and require a full 16oz water bottle for the day. The teachers will have designated water breaks throughout the flow of the day. In addition to water, children should also consume adequate minerals (Sodium, Potassium, Magnesium) through food, which aid in maintaining proper hydration.

Sunburn—Sunburns are a common year-round concern, even on cloudy days. Pack sunscreen 50+ SPF for your child. Apply sunscreen to all of your child's exposed skin, prior to drop off and always pack a sun hat for an added protection. Long pants and sleeves work great for sunburn prevention.

Poison Oak—In California, this is a common year-round hazard as poison oak is always in season. To prevent poison oak exposure, dress your child in long sleeves and pants. In Pathfinders, children learn how to identify poison oak as an added layer of protection. Teachers carry **Technu** and **Poison Oak Wipes**, which is used on skin or clothes that have come into contact with poison oak oils, in the event a child comes into contact. We will inform you if your child has been exposed to poison oak.

Stinging Nettles—This plant leaves a painful sting after being touched. The sting fades within 24 hours, but can be bothersome in the meantime. Long sleeves and long pants help avoid being stung, when coming into contact.

Ticks—Ticks are common at many Pathfinders destinations year-round, but are prevalent in Fall and Spring. Long sleeves, pants, and closed toed shoes are the best prevention. In addition, teachers apply an herbal insect spray, neck to foot, on the children.

It is imperative to complete a daily tick check after each Pathfinders day. Ticks in this area can carry Lyme disease and finding it early is one of the best ways to mitigate risks. Look under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist and hairline. If a latched tick is found on your child, remove it immediately, making sure that the head and mouth are removed. You can keep the tick and send it in for testing.

In most cases, the tick must be attached for 36-48 hours before Lyme disease bacterium can be transmitted. Immature ticks, or nymphs, are the most likely to spread Lyme disease, and are most active in Fall and Spring.

Wildlife—Although rare, there is a potential for a rattlesnake, bobcat, coyote or mountain lion encounter. In the rare case that Pathfinders does encounter one of these animals, the teachers will be sure to avoid all possible dangerous interaction. However, Pathfinders operates in the outdoors, in wild locations, so be aware that these rare occurrences have the potential to take place.

General Safety Practices

Safety is the top priority in Pathfinders. All staff are required to maintain current status on the following certifications— CPR, First Aid, Child Abuse Prevention

Each staff member carries a first aid kit.

Each day during safety checks, the group discusses what potential hazards (i.e. parking lots, dogs, sticky mud) are at each location. The group brainstorms safety rules and how to respond to potential hazards.

Prior to any exploration or play, teachers scout exploratory spaces to ensure they are safe and set appropriate boundaries with the children.

Pathfinders maintains a high staff to child ratio to further ensure child safety.

Part III—The School Year

2024-2025 School Calendar

Pathfinders operates September 3, 2024 through June 5, 2025.

Pathfinders observes the following federal holidays and local PAUSD holidays, and **will not operate** on these days:

- **Thanksgiving Break**—Monday, November 25, 2024 to Friday November 29, 2025
- **Winter Break**—Monday, December 23, 2024 to Monday, January 6, 2025
*school resumes on Tuesday, January 7, 2025
- **Local Holiday** – Thursday, February 13, 2025
- **Spring Break**—Monday April 7, 2025 to Friday, April 11, 2025

The lead teacher will alert parents of these observed holidays during their weekly update emails and will verbally check in with parents/caregivers during drop-off/pick-up.

First and Last Day of Pathfinders

Traditionally, on the first and last day of Pathfinders, families are encouraged to participate. On the first day, parents/guardians will help children adjust into the new environment and routine. On the last day, parents/guardians will participate in a ceremony to celebrate the children and their time in Pathfinders.

Transitions in the Program

Establishing trust is an important component for a successful transition into the program. In order for children to feel confident in themselves and to build trust with their teachers, parents/caregivers need to display trust and confidence in the teachers and the child. Teachers are skilled in supporting children's difficult emotions during transitions. If a child is having consistent difficulties, Lead

teacher will collaborate with parents/caregivers in order to create a plan that is supportive for the child's success.

Participation Days

Parent are invited to observe Pathfinders once or twice in the school year, starting in October. Be sure to make arrangements with the lead teacher, prior to the visit, to discuss expectations and any plans during the Participation Day.

On the Participation Day, parents/caregivers operate as another staff member; they are asked to assist **all** children, activities of the day, and follow the lead of the teachers. Parents' main role is to support the whole group, gain insight into the program and develop a new understanding of your child's adventures.

Parents/caregivers are welcome to bring books, tell stories, lead a game or art projects. **All activities must be pre-approved by the lead teacher.**

Guest Visits

Similar to an indoor program, community members are invited to observe Pathfinders, when interested. Community members' visits must be pre-approved by the lead teacher. Guests' roles and expectations are clearly explained prior to visit. Guests check in with teachers at the beginning and end of the day. Any guest visits will be communicated to parents in lead teacher's weekly update email.

Children's Birthdays

Families are more than welcome to celebrate their child's birthdays during the program. Reach out to lead teacher in advance, in order to make arrangements and to ensure the celebration is in line with Pathfinders philosophy. A trash-free snack and/or planned activity that celebrates your child's birthday are acceptable. Reach out to lead teacher to ensure snack does not pose a risk to any of the children's allergies.

Pathfinders Community Events

Relationships are foundational to Pathfinders' success. In order to build relationships and a community where the children can develop a sense of belonging, Pathfinders will host community events throughout the school year.

Family Picnic Day—Held at the beginning of the year. Creates an opportunity for families to meet other families, parents to connect with Pathfinders teachers, and for the children to deepen their relationships to one another and the Pathfinders adults in their lives.

Last Day at Pathfinders—On the last day of the year. Parents/caregivers and siblings are invited to Pathfinders at lunchtime. There, the Pathfinders community enjoys lunch together and closes out the year commemorating the children, highlighting their growth and success, sharing memories, and saying farewells. This is also a day of celebration for the children who are graduating from the program or won't be returning for another year.

Additional events will be planned throughout the year, and will be communicated to parents via lead teacher weekly update emails and in-person check ins.

Conferences

Lead teachers hold two conferences during the school year.

- **Fall conferences**—Typically occur in October/November. This conference helps teachers gain a stronger sense of the child by providing parents an opportunity to share some more information about their child. Teachers share how their child is adjusting into the program, thus far.
- **Spring conferences**—Typically occur in late March/April. This conference discusses the child's development, achievements, kindergarten readiness (if applicable), future program recommendations, and stories/observations from teachers. Parents can provide more insight into their child's participation in Pathfinders.

In addition, as concerns or topics arise, the lead teacher is available throughout the year for check ins, either via email, in person or on the phone.

Communication

Staff Responsibility

Pathfinders provides consistent, honest, and transparent communication to its families to ensure program satisfaction and success.

Below are a list of responsibilities staff agree to:

- Provide verbal daily check-ins, if desired by parent/caregiver or needed by teacher, at pick-up that are child-specific and provide any general program logistical updates
- Send out a weekly update email about the week's adventures, share any program updates, and information for the next week.
- Any additional program information will be sent via email to parents.

Director and teachers will respond to emails within **3-5 business days**.

Parent Responsibility

Parents are active participants in their child's success in the program and their active participation in communication with teachers and director are integral to that success.

Below are a list of responsibilities parents/caregivers agree to:

- Thoroughly read all director/teacher email correspondence
- Provide responses, when requested, in a timely manner that supports the program's success
- Communicate with teachers/director during appropriate times of day
- Appropriately and respectfully use the different methods of communication with director/teacher
- Communicate with kindness, respect, patience, and honesty

If check-ins are requested, schedule with director/lead teacher via email.

Methods of Communication

Below is a list of ways to communicate with Pathfinders staff and the appropriate ways to use each method.

Email—General program questions, changes in enrollment, expressing concerns/grievances, program referrals, child specific requests and/or recommendations. Communication that does not require immediate response.

Phone—In-depth, topic-specific conversations that are not appropriate during drop-off, pick-up or in front of children. **Call prior to 6pm or after 8am, Monday to Friday (unless prior scheduled).**

Text—Communicate changes in attendance, illness, tardiness for drop-off/pick-up, pick-up person changes; last minute urgent communication that impacts the day's program. Occasionally, teachers may send photos to parents/caregivers of the child's day in Pathfinders. **Send text messages prior to 6pm or after 7am, Monday to Friday. Weekend text messages will be addressed on the next business day.**

In-person/Zoom—Similar use to phone communication for in-depth, topic-specific conversations. Used to discuss concerns or grievances.

IN CASES OF MEDICAL EMERGENCY, YOU CAN CALL DREW AT ANY TIME.

Part VI—Program Policies

Nut Policy

If a child in the program has a known nut allergy, this must be communicated to director and lead teacher, prior to the start of the program. In addition, include nut allergy on “Allergy Form”.

If there is a known nut allergy, Pathfinders will become a **nut-free program**.

Any seed butters must be clearly labeled as nut-free.

Allergy Policy

It is the parent’s responsibility to communicate their child’s known allergies on the Emergency Medical Form and Allergy Form, prior to the child’s start of the program.

If there is an update to a child’s allergies, communicate any changes to lead teacher, as soon as possible, in order to complete a new “Allergy Form”.

Any medications, such as an Epi-pen, must be stored in an easily accessible location in child’s backpack and must be brought each day.

If parents would like to provide treats for celebratory reasons, consult lead teacher prior to bringing the treat, to ensure it is inclusive of any allergy restrictions.

Staff are not responsible for storing any medication.

Child Illness Policy

Each family has a responsibility of upholding this policy to ensure the safety of all children and staff in the program.

If a child meets any of the listed symptoms, your child will **not** be able to attend Pathfinders until symptoms subside.

- A fever of 100 degrees or higher
- A runny nose with **thick green** or **yellow** mucus
- A cough with mucus secretion
- Contagious skin ailments such as cold sores, ringworm, fever blisters or lice
- Recurring diarrhea
- Continued vomiting, or vomiting paired with a fever, stomach ache, sore throat or fatigue
- Pink eye
- Any contagious diseases (i.e. COVID-19, influenza, etc.)
- Jet lag
- Allergic reactions: If your child is enduring or recovering from an allergic reaction, it can be dangerous to send them to Pathfinders

Upon a successful complete full day of wellness (24 hours without a fever, without fever reducing medication) or confirmation by a medical professional, your child can return to Pathfinders. If unsure about any of the listed conditions, communicate with lead teacher, in advance, to determine the best course of action for your child and other participants.

Be aware that sick days are unanticipated; no refunds will be offered.

If your child is sick and cannot attend, inform the lead teacher by 8am via text message or phone call, so staff can expect the absence, plan for the day, and have a timely program departure.

COVID-19

Person with a COVID-19 Positive Test

Individuals with symptoms:

- Remain at home for at least 24 hours from the day of symptom onset.
- May return if 24 hours have passed with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications AND symptoms are mild and improving.
- Recommended to wear a mask when around other people indoors for the 10 days after you became sick or tested positive. You may remove a mask sooner than 10 days if you have two sequential negative tests at least one day apart.
- Staff are required to wear a mask at work for the 10 days after you became sick or tested positive.

Individuals with no symptoms:

- There is no required isolation or exclusion.
- If you develop symptoms later, follow the symptom guidelines above.
- Recommended to wear a mask when around other people indoors for the 10 days after you became sick or tested positive. You may remove a mask sooner than 10 days if you have two sequential negative tests at least one day apart.
- Staff are required to wear a mask at work for the 10 days after you became sick or tested positive.

Close Contact to a Person with COVID-19

- May continue to attend school/work as long as they are not symptomatic.
- Students and staff with symptoms must stay home and get tested immediately.
- Students and staff with no symptoms who are also at a higher risk for severe COVID-19 are encouraged to test within 5 days.
- If you are going to have contact with people who are at higher risk for severe COVID-19, you are encouraged to mask indoors around such people for 10 days and consider testing within 5 days after the last exposure and before contact with high-risk people.
- Those with symptoms can return if test is negative once symptoms improve and no fever for at least 24 hours without fever reducing medication.

Staff Illness Policy

Teachers can experience unanticipated illnesses and medical emergencies. On the rare occasion that a teacher(s) is/are unable to host a Pathfinders session, and no suitable substitute is available, Pathfinders will be **cancelled for the session** and your child will not be cared for by Pathfinders staff.

No refunds will be offered for the cancelled session. Included in tuition is five paid sick days per year for all teachers.

Parents will be notified of a cancelled day, due to staff sickness, as soon as possible. Teachers will do their best to provide warnings of potential cancellations, a minimum of 12 hours prior to the start of the session.

Staff understand the importance of Pathfinders for its community and make all efforts to avoid cancellations.

Inclement Weather Conditions

Pathfinders is a nature-based, 100% outdoor program. Because of this, the program is subject to the unpredictability of nature.

Properly prepared children combined with appropriate location choices allow the program to function in most weather conditions. However, there are certain weather conditions that inhibit the program's operation and can pose potential health risks to staff and children.

Below is a list of poor weather conditions:

- **Air quality over 100psi.** Staff uses Purple Air and AirNow on "woodsmoke" filters to determine air quality. *Monitored during California's fire season.*
- **Heavy rains with high winds** that impede on the program's operation or pose a safety risk, especially while driving
- **Hail**

In the event of inclement weather, **Pathfinders will be cancelled until it is safe for normal operation to resume. No refund will be issued due to unanticipated poor weather conditions.**

Pathfinders sees importance and value in children experiencing different weather conditions and works to safely operate in most weather conditions to support their exploration and learning.

State and Local Emergencies

There is a potential for national or local emergencies. The most likely emergency situations to impact Pathfinders will be—unsafe road conditions impacted by wind advisories, flash flood or other flood warnings, wild fires, smoke or earthquakes.

If one of these situations does occur, parents will be notified as early as possible so that alternative arrangements can be made. **No refunds will be offered on**

unanticipated emergencies and Pathfinders will not be able to care for any children on that day.

If you have any questions or concerns about sending your child to Pathfinders on any specific day, or in particular conditions, reach out to the lead teacher and determine the best course of action.

Enrollment Changes

Changes in enrollment, to add or reduce days, must be submitted via email to the lead teacher and director. Changes to enrollment depend on availability and child's performance in program, thus far.

Director will communicate changes in tuition, via email, to parents. Any additional tuition payments, for an increase in days, will be due within **2 weeks** of enrollment change. Director will refund any tuition payment, for the reduction in days, within **2 weeks** of enrollment change.

Program Withdrawal

Each member of the Pathfinders community is valued and appreciated. Pathfinders understands that unpredictable life factors can impact enrollment status.

In the event that a family needs to withdrawal from the Pathfinders program, a **minimum of a 30-day notice** must be given to director and lead teacher, **via email**. In addition, the specific last day of program attendance must be provided so that teachers can prepare the group and plan a last day celebration, if requested. If parents choose to withdraw their child/children, for any reason, from the program the full tuition for the entire year is still due and payable until/unless a suitable replacement is made. The school may **TERMINATE** this agreement if it becomes evident that the program is not a good match for the student and/or family. Tuition will be due for the month post termination as well as the month of dismissal.

Exclusionary Policy

Pathfinders believes all children deserve the opportunity to develop a nature connection and spend ample time in the outdoors. The program works to create an inclusive and welcoming space for a variety of families and children.

However, there are specific criteria for program acceptance. Here is a list of criteria for Pathfinders acceptance:

- Be 3 years old by September 1st of the current school year
- Fully potty trained and out of a diapers during the day

A families' success in the program will be assessed throughout the year. Lead teacher and Director will make appropriate recommendations for program participation that supports this success.

Pathfinders reserves the right to request program withdrawal if it is determined that the program isn't an appropriate fit for the family.

Process for Parent/Guardian Concerns

When communicating concerns, all communication must be respectful and kind. Pathfinders believes in **Peacemaking**—listening to all parties' perspectives with open minds and open hearts, in order to work towards a solution that supports all parties involved.

If concerns are specific to the program, with another child or parent, communicate concerns to the lead teacher. **Drop-off or pick-up is not an appropriate time to communicate concerns.** Email all concerns to lead teacher.

If concerns are specific to a teacher, communicate concerns to the specific staff and director. When dealing with staff concerns, director prefers **phone calls and in-person scheduled meetings.** **Drop off and pick up are not appropriate times to communicate concerns.**