



Metamora District #1
Riverview District #2
Fieldcrest District #6
Lowpoint Washburn District #21/Roanoke-Benson District #60

PARENT HANDBOOK

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Welcome to the Bright Beginnings classroom program. Our program is run through the Woodford County Special Education Association. This handbook is provided to inform you of the philosophy, day-to-day procedures, and policies of the program. Please read it very carefully and refer any questions to your child's teacher or program administrator.

We welcome your active interest and participation in your child's education. Thank you for allowing us to be part of your family's life.

PROGRAM HANDBOOK

The program handbook reflects current policies and procedures. The administration reserves the right to establish or change policies/procedures, as deemed appropriate. Parents will be notified of such changes. It is the responsibility of the parent to read the handbook entirely and become aware of its contents. The remainder of this handbook is organized by topic in alphabetic order.

ARRIVAL AND PICK UP

Established times have been set by each teacher for students to arrive at school and be picked up at school. Classroom staff is not available to supervise children who are brought to school prior to the established time or left at school after the established pick-up time. Situations such as parental separation/divorce/joint custody/restraining orders must be clearly explained to the classroom teacher. Documentation regarding custody or parental rights may be required. **Please discuss these very important matters privately and promptly with the classroom teacher.**

ASSESSMENT

The classroom program utilizes authentic assessment to gather, record, and report information about children's development and progress. Actual samples of work, photographs, and written records of performance will be collected and shared with you. This method is ongoing and provides an accurate description of growth and change in your child's skills. Activities are planned daily to introduce new skills, model skills, provide experience and practice, and document progress.

Your child's teacher will complete a **preschool skills summary using the High Scope COR** for most students two times per year. This is somewhat like a report card, documenting the skills your child performs and is developing in a variety of areas. The teacher will also be collecting samples of your child's developing skills using a **portfolio**. This will be shared with you at parent teacher conferences and contains 2 collection periods. Some teachers may use other forms of assessment in order to gather data and report on your child's progress.

Students who receive special education services will also have progress updates on their goal/objectives at the same time as report cards are issued for students in grades K-12. Baseline data is gathered during the evaluation process for our students receiving special education. Skills are closely monitored using rubrics from Play Based Interventions (Linder), The Early Childhood Outcomes rating system, and The Illinois Early Learning Guidelines.

ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to be at school every day unless they are ill or there is a family emergency. **If a child is sick, he/she must stay home for his/her own sake and in consideration of classmates and staff.** Your child's teacher will provide you with the local district policy of phoning in absences and providing a doctor's note for extended absences.

Our program is designed to build positive school habits and skills necessary for long-term success in school. We do this through a structured, consistent routine. Plan to have your child attend school every day.

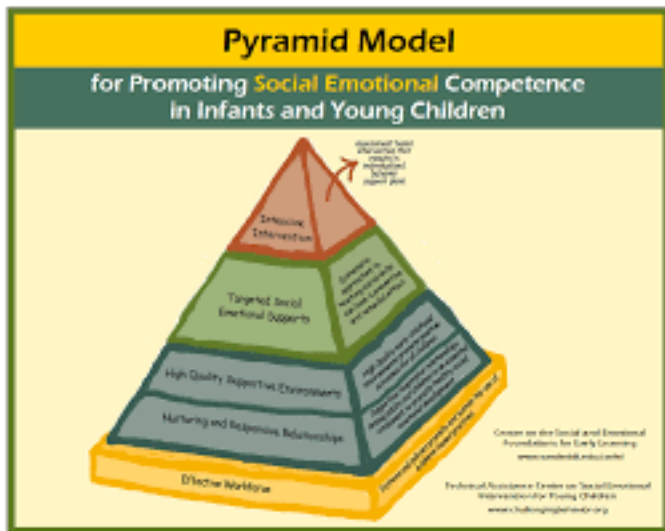
1. Students are expected to demonstrate regular school attendance. This includes arriving on time for school each day and being picked up on time each day.
2. Parents are expected to follow district procedures and phone in absences.
3. If a pattern of absences develops during the school year, the teacher will contact the program administrator to report the problem. Parents will be contacted for more information and to develop a plan for regular school attendance. It may be determined that the Bright Beginnings program is not the best match for family needs and your child will not be able to continue attending. Tardiness, including late arrivals and pick-ups, are included in this category.

BACKPACK

The book bag/backpack is a very important link between home and school. It should travel to and from school with your child daily. Try to find one that he/she can open and close independently. Be sure to check the book bag every day for informative notes from the teacher or the office, and to look at your child's creations with him/her. Children should not bring money, toys, or other items not necessary for school.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

The conduct of children in the Bright Beginnings program shall be based on the fundamentals of the Center for the Foundations of Social Emotional Learning. The pyramid model is the foundation for our approaches:



1. Teachers are properly trained in social emotional learning.
2. Staff work to build supportive, responsive relationships with students and promote these between parents and children.
3. Programming at school is high quality.
4. Social skills groups are conducted to target specific needs using a social emotional learning curriculum.
5. Some children receive more intensive social skills instruction based on data/needs shown in the classroom.

Social emotional development and behavior management is based on the belief that all children must understand and maintain a reasonable code of acceptable behavior and follow the school rules set by the adult school staff. Children need to understand the consequences of their actions and choices and learn to accept responsibility as a member of the classroom community. The classroom teacher will provide you with a copy of the classroom rules. Most classrooms have the same basic rules, focusing on respect and kindness. These rules are consistently referred to throughout the day as a learning tool. The first month of school is spent learning the rules and routine, as well as establishing relationships.

- **Social skills emphasis** – the program uses social skills lessons, as well as daily activities, modeling, and books that emphasize self-control, responsibility, and respect. Staff promotes the labeling and expression of feelings, problem solving with peers and adults, and the ability to self-calm.
- **Structure** – a predictable routine is followed each day with a visual schedule that is reviewed as the day begins, showing children what will happen each day.
- **Self -Control** – children must learn to delay gratification by waiting their turn, sharing materials, listening to the ideas of others, and managing their emotions such as excitability, disappointment, and anger. Staff will use books, discussions, puppets, lessons, and modeling to reinforce self-control. Strategies to self-calm including counting, deep breathing, and sensory activities will be reviewed weekly.

- **A specific behavior management plan** – children may require more specific assistance and intervention to manage behavior when the above methods are still not resulting in positive change. Parents work with school staff to develop a specialized plan to teach appropriate skills and reduce negative skills.
- **CPI Nonviolent Crisis Intervention** - Strategies are used to build an effective culture of safety in the classroom. It is a safe approach designed to provide the best possible care, welfare, safety and security for individuals presenting a range of crisis behaviors while de-escalating a child.

Our goal is to help all children develop and maintain appropriate relationships and self- control. Learning to follow rules and routines is a big part of this. The age and development level or disability of the child are always taken into consideration.

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS NEWSLETTER and CORRESPONDENCE

A weekly program newsletter is sent home weekly. Most teachers use a classroom website or app to post information. Some classrooms have a home school notebook or daily sheet that goes back and forth. If you have specific questions for the teacher, send a note, email or call the school during times designated by the teacher. Parent teacher conferences are held twice per year. IEP meetings are scheduled once per year, or more, as needed. We welcome communication and visits to the classroom so you are informed!

BLENDED CLASSROOMS

Blended preschool classrooms have students who do and do not receive special education (IEP) services attend class together. All classes are blended with a typical class size of up to 15 students per session. Students receive different levels of instructional and environmental support, based on individual needs. This model provides a very successful learning environment for all children, fostering acceptance, patience, and most of all, respect. Most of our classrooms are blended.

BOOK LENDING LIBRARY

Families may use the lending library at the Woodford County Special Education Association office in Metamora. Parent resources include books and videos on topics that interest parents with young children. If there is a particular topic you are interested in, contact your child's teacher. We can arrange to check out materials for you, through the classroom.

CLASSROOM VOLUNTEERS AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to support the classroom in many ways. Each classroom welcomes parent or grandparent volunteers to assist children at center time, read to individual children, or play games. All regular volunteers are subject to a criminal background check, as required by law. Additionally, all regular volunteers are required to watch a short online training on child abuse and neglect. Parents are also welcome to schedule time to visit the classroom from time to time without being a regular volunteer. Call or email your child's teacher to volunteer.

COVID 19

There are currently no mandates for schools.

CURRICULUM

Our program uses the HighScope Curriculum. HighScope's education approach emphasizes "active participatory learning." Active learning includes direct, hands-on learning experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas. HighScope takes the learning process beyond traditional academic subjects by applying methods that promote independence, curiosity, decision-making, cooperation, persistence, creativity, and problem solving in young children.

A second unique feature is our curriculum content, the social, intellectual, and physical building blocks that are essential to young children's optimal growth. Our content areas are organized in eight main categories that correspond to state and national learning standards; the categories are (1) Approaches to Learning; (2) Social and Emotional Development; (3) Physical Development and Health; (4) Language, Literacy, and Communication; (5) Mathematics; (6) Creative Arts; (7) Science and Technology; and (8) Social Studies.

Our program also uses the Illinois Early Learning Guidelines (to develop foundational skills for children who are working on skills like task completion, joint attention, turn taking, learning to use language).

Examples of skills worked on in a Bright Beginnings classroom include:

- Phonological awareness (rhyming, phoneme segmentation, discriminating sounds)
- Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Book skills and knowledge (print progresses from left to right, top to bottom)
- Print knowledge (print has meaning and conveys a message – names, words, signs)
- Sound and letter awareness
- Quantity and number (counting by rote, meaningful counting, number recognition)
- Math concepts (more/less, big/little, today/yesterday/tomorrow)
- Patterning/sorting (sort items by color, shape, size or similarity, match a simple pattern)
- Seriating/Shapes (ordering items by size, shape skills)
- Developing relationships with others (naming peers, interacting with peers/adults, expressing feelings, working in a group)
- Understanding rules (follows routine, restates rules and reasons for rules, accepts redirection from an adult, begins to develop self control)
- Group discussions – listens to and contributes ideas
- Group projects – works with two to three other children
- Representation – builds or draws things that represent something else
- Active play with gross motor skills – ball skills, group movement games like Simon Says, the Hokey Pokey.
- Active play with fine motor skills – manipulates toys such as Legos, small blocks, unifix cubes, cuts with scissors, glues items to paper, paints, draws, and writes

DRESS CODE/CLOTHING

Preschool-aged children are very busy and active learners. Please dress your child in clothes that allow him/her to move and explore. Shoes and socks are strongly recommended for safety reasons.

ELIGIBILITY FOR BRIGHT BEGINNINGS – PRESCHOOL FOR ALL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

There are two types of eligibility and access to the Bright Beginnings classroom program. Some children are eligible through **Preschool For ALL (PFA)**. They participated in a developmental screening and were found to be “at risk” of academic failure. Children may exhibit mild developmental delays, lack experience, or have other factors within the family or home environment that present a need for a structured preschool program prior to Kindergarten.

The Bright Beginnings program also serves preschool age children with disabilities through **Early Childhood**. Students have participated in a screening and comprehensive evaluation called a play based assessment. Students are eligible for special education services and have Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which designates specialized instruction, related services, and any accommodations to help them develop skills.

Three, four, and five-year old children (not yet eligible for kindergarten) may be considered for the Bright Beginnings program. The Illinois State Board of Education clearly states that children who are age eligible for kindergarten (five years old on or before September 1 of each year) cannot remain in Bright Beginnings PFA.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Fire and tornado emergency procedures are practiced in the classroom on a monthly basis. Each district has established safety procedures in the event of a crisis situation. All school staff know these procedures.

Each school district has established school safety procedures for the protection of students, staff, and parents. Most districts have a central door to enter and all other doors are locked. Visitors, including parents, are required to sign in at the central office. Parents may be required to wear a visitor’s badge.

In the event of extreme heat, snow or ice, please listen to the local radio/TV stations or check the school website to find out if school is canceled or will be dismissed early. School districts make every effort to have children attend school. However, if current or forecasted weather conditions may risk the safety of students, staff, or parents, school may be closed or dismissed early so your child may return home safely.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Preschool families are informed about district family events. WCSEA has a Parent Advisory Council that meets monthly with representatives from districts and WCSEA Administration. Teachers will send home a monthly parent/family activity, as well. All of these are optional.

GRIEVANCE POLICY

It is our hope that you will be very pleased with your child’s classroom program. If a concern arises, we ask that you first speak directly with your child’s classroom teacher. They are in the classroom every day and directly oversee what happens in their classroom. If the teacher cannot address your concern or you cannot come to an agreement, please contact the WCSEA office to speak with the program administrator. If your concern relates to transportation, please direct your call to the local district.

At all times, respect shall be shown to parents and we ask that respect be shown to staff. Staff members will not continue conversations that become abusive or threatening and have been instructed to promptly end phone calls or meetings if this occurs. Any incidents of this nature will be reported to the local district principal and the WCSEA program administrator. The administration will determine the appropriate course of action.

HANDWASHING

For your child's health and safety and the health and safety of others in the classroom, all children and adults should wash hands upon arrival at school, before eating or preparing food, after using the bathroom, and after wiping their nose. Hands should be washed with soap and warm water and dried with a paper towel but hand-sanitizer may be used. Staff will help children learn to become independent in hand washing.

HEALTH CONDITIONS/ALLERGIES/PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS/DIET

For your child's safety, it is imperative that you inform the classroom staff if your child has any medical conditions, allergies, dietary restrictions, or physical limitations. Alert the teacher if your child takes prescription medication and if any side effects may be seen at school. If a child requires medication or a health procedure at school, written instructions and/or a prescription are required from the child's physician. Training/demonstration for staff may also be required. **NO MEDICAL PROCEDURE OR MEDICATION WILL BE GIVEN WITHOUT PROPER DOCUMENTATION FROM A LICENSED MEDICAL PHYSICIAN, AUTHORIZED TO TREAT AND DISPENSE MEDICATION, per the Illinois School Code.**

This information must be provided in a timely manner, allowing school staff adequate time to review information and make any needed preparations. **Please discuss these individual matters with the classroom teacher prior to the child's first day of school.**

HOLIDAYS/BIRTHDAYS

Classrooms may plan special activities for major holidays (Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter) but will not have formal holiday parties. Please check with the teacher regarding birthday treats.

ILLNESS

Each classroom follows the local district guidelines and policies regarding illness. If symptoms of illness are present, staff will contact parents or the emergency designee. A school is no place for an ill child. Parents should develop an emergency illness plan, recognizing that there is a chance that children could become ill or hurt at school. Consider - who do I know that could pick up my child at school on very short notice? Who can care for my child in the event they are sick and can't attend school for a day or more?

When parents or emergency contacts can't be reached, your child sits and waits/ they can become worried, especially since they don't feel well. This can all be avoided by keeping children home who have recently been sick, are sick, or just aren't feeling well and may be coming down with something. Since some illnesses come on almost without warning, get your emergency plan figured out now.

If your child has been out of school due to a contagious illness such as impetigo, pinkeye, or ringworm, a physician's note showing treatment is required for re-entry. Additional requirements are in place in each district regarding head lice.

If your child has undergone surgery, a physician's note regarding the return to school is required. Any limitations should be included in the note.

Absolutely do not send children to school displaying the following conditions:

- **Diarrhea or loose stools for 24 hours)**
- **Vomiting (no vomiting for 24 hours)**
- **Fever (fever free for 24 hours without medication)**
- **Mouth sores**
- **Sore throat**
- **Rash**
- **Eye discharge**
- **Persistent coughing**
- **Persistent runny or stuffy nose**
- **Illness which prevents the child from participating comfortably in program activities – this often includes bad colds and coughs**
- **Illness which calls for greater care than the staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children**
- **Lethargy, irritability, persistent crying, difficulty breathing or other signs of possible severe illness**
- **ANY SIGN OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASE SUCH AS: chicken pox, measles, mumps, pink eye, MRSA hepatitis, skin lesions and CMV**

INJURY

Children may scuff a knee or bump an arm or elbow from time to time. These occurrences usually involve a hug, soap/water, and a bandage. Ice packs may be used to prevent swelling or bruising, based on a particular injury. Universal precautions to prevent the contact or spread of blood borne pathogens are used by staff. Teachers use professional judgment regarding notes home about minor injuries. They will send a note home, based on the severity of the incident. If a child's injury is beyond what staff is able to treat or if staff is concerned about a particular injury or complaint from a child, parents/emergency designees will be contacted by phone. The incident will also be documented in writing by school staff, using a district accident report form. If an injury is life threatening, an ambulance will be called.

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION

The Bright Beginnings program has a transition process for all children who are in their last year of preschool. During the second semester, the Bright Beginnings teacher will plan different activities designed to prepare students, staff and parents for the kindergarten year. Activities include reading books about kindergarten, visiting the kindergarten classrooms, meeting with kindergarten staff, or informing parents of district kindergarten registration requirements, kindergarten roundup, and kindergarten procedures. Sometimes, the needs of students require even greater preparation for kindergarten transition. These are handled on a case-by-case basis but we begin working on plans in January of each year.

LOCAL DISTRICT SAFETY

All local districts maintain certification of asbestos free and lead free environments, life safety building inspections by the Regional Office of Education, firefighter inspections of fire extinguishers, and school bus inspections.

MANDATED REPORTER STATUS

Illinois State law requires all school personnel to report suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect. The Bright Beginnings and local district staff are aware of their responsibilities with the law and follow proper procedures, as needed. All reports to the child abuse/neglect hotline are confidential.

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parent teacher conferences are formally scheduled 1-2 times per year to review your child's progress. Other conferences may be scheduled as needed to discuss individual questions.

Parents of students receiving early childhood or speech services will also participate in an annual review during the spring of each year. Student progress toward goals and objectives on their IEP will be reviewed and recommendations for the next school year will be discussed.

PHILOSOPHY

The Bright Beginnings program follows **the Illinois State Board of Education's Early Learning and Development Standards**. The classroom activities and environments are age appropriate and individual appropriate. There is a balance of teacher directed and child directed activities. We respect individual, family, and cultural differences and promote respect and acceptance. You will find a variety of developmental levels and ages in the preschool classroom. Children are provided with materials and activities that match their development level. If children are not ready to work on a particular skill such as rhyming words, the teacher will target the precursor skill to the activity with that child or find another appropriate activity.

RELEASE OF RECORDS OR INFORMATION

Student and family information is confidential and cannot be released to anyone other than the parent/legal guardian without written parent consent. DCFS and officers of the court supersede this law. If you would like us to speak with an outside agency or district, a release of information form must be completed and signed. The release is good for one year.

REMOTE LEARNING

In the event of a local, statewide or national pandemic or other type of emergency situation, the school district may cease to have students attend at the school. Remote Learning may be initiated. Remote learning means that your child will not physically attend school but they will still be provided lessons, instruction, and opportunities to engage virtually. Teachers and staff use a variety of methods to reach and teach students, as well as support parents and caregivers.

REQUIRED RECORDS

All children must have a courthouse copy of their birth certificate, a school physical (must be within one year of the first day of school) from a licensed physician, a record of up-to-date immunizations and proof of income. These are all requirements of the Illinois School Code. These must be on file prior to the child starting school, as well as the general registration forms for our program.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

The Bright Beginnings Program follows most of the school calendar of the local district where the child is attending. There may be a few days used during the year when the Preschool for All (preK) students do not attend. These days are planned for staff to provide required assessments to students who qualify for special education services. You will be given notice of these days at least a month in advance. A school calendar will be furnished to parents upon enrollment. Any changes will be clearly communicated in advance. The Preschool for All students (preK) end one week prior to the end of school.

SNACKS

A small snack is offered each day with water, juice or milk. The classroom program follows preschool snack guidelines provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). A snack menu is provided to parents. If your child has a special diet due to allergies or a medical condition, we will work with you to provide an appropriate alternative and safe snack. A snack menu will be provided to you by your child's teacher.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Teachers in the Bright Beginnings program are required to have an Illinois Professional Educator License They have completed a program of study at an accredited university and have a bachelor's or master's degree in education. Teacher Assistants are required to have an Illinois Paraprofessional License. All staff have had a criminal background check including fingerprinting. Staff participates in continuing education through coursework or teacher education workshops.

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION

Public Act 100-105 Suspension - Expulsion of Children Birth to Five Governor Rauner signed Public Act 100-105 on August 14, 2017. The law will take effect on January 1, 2018. The goal of Public Act 100-105 is to ensure that early childhood programs engage in best practices in their disciplinary actions by prohibiting the use of expulsions due to child behavior. Planned transitions, after documented attempts to address the child's needs, are not considered expulsions. The bill also puts in place a system to track transitions, providing data to better understand the issue and identify the need for additional resources. This is particularly troubling given that research suggests that school expulsion and suspension practices are associated with negative educational and life outcomes. Early suspension, expulsion, and other exclusionary discipline practices contribute to setting many young children's educational trajectories in a negative direction from the beginning. This has long term consequences for children, their families, and the schools that they will later attend. As needed, Bright Beginnings will provide multiple observations of challenging behavior, communication with the family, planned interventions, and further discussion if a transition out of the program (to receive further resources) is needed.

TOILETING

Children will take bathroom breaks during the day. Children are encouraged to take care of personal hygiene and dressing as independently as possible. Keep things simple and dress your child in clothing that is easy to take off and on for purposes in the restroom. This saves a lot of time. If your child is not yet toilet trained, staff encourage children to follow a bathroom routine that includes being as independent as possible with dressing/undressing, as well as washing hands. Children will be changed, as needed. All toileting supplies such as diapers/pull ups; wipes and a change of clothes are the responsibility of the parents. . Staff will notify parents when supplies are getting low.

Please note: It is a good idea to limit drinks prior to boarding the school bus since many children have a long bus ride.

TRANSITION INTO THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

All parents will be provided registration forms and an introductory letter and flier about the classroom program. A mandatory orientation visit (parent and child) will be scheduled and staff will explain the classroom day and get to meet each other. Bussing arrangements are made at this time. Any special circumstances that will help a child transition into the program will be discussed at this time. If you need assistance with form completion or other requirements, please let the teacher know. We are happy to assist you.

TRANSITION OUT OF THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

If for some reason, your child needs to drop from our program, all of their materials (portfolio, extra set of clothes, etc.) will be sent home. If you are moving to another community and wish to enroll your child in a preschool program there, we will assist you. We will copy all of your child's records and give them to you. We will also have you sign a release of information in the event that the new school requests records. Please contact Maureen Whalen at the main office to assist you with school transfers.

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Vision – The vision of Woodford County Special Education Association is to meet the educational needs of all learners with or at risk of disabilities. The Bright Beginnings program is designed to provide foundational experiences in the areas of parenting, child development, and school readiness allowing children and families to develop to their fullest potential.

Mission (Purpose) – Our program is designed to be a safe environment where children have exposure and experiences to help them develop skills critical for school and life. We want our children to feel cared about, develop friendships with peers and adults, become independent, and feel confident to share thoughts and ideas. We will always meet children where they are at and support them to move forward. We will work as a team with families.