



Metamora District #1
Riverview District #2
Fieldcrest District #6
Lowpoint Washburn District #21/Roanoke-Benson District #60
Germantown Hills #69
Eureka District #140

PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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Welcome to our 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. Children will always be escorted to and from the bus.

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.

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 contact the bus driver and teacher when a child is absent.

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 items which are unnecessary 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. Children receive more intensive social skills instruction based on data/needs shown in the classroom.

The following methods are used to instill a safe, productive learning environment for all:

- **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 and Regulation** – 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 provide direct instruction such as deep breathing, use of sensory systems and modeling to reinforce self-control/regulation.
- **Verbal Redirection** – a technique used often to redirect a child’s words or actions to something more appropriate. Child is throwing blocks. The teacher says, “The blocks stay on the floor.” Child walks away from circle time. The teacher says, “I need you to stay with me on the carpet.” The redirection is given once or twice, in a very short, simple phrase with the adult stepping back to give the child space to redirect their actions.
- **Physical Redirection** – same concept as verbal redirection, but some children require hands on support to change the activity. Some need hand over hand redirection to pick up toys. Some need physical guidance to move to another center.
- **Direct statement** – used firmly, but fairly, in a nonthreatening manner. Some children respond faster and better when told directly what to do or what not to do. Child attempts to poke another child with a crayon. Teacher says, “You may write with the crayons or color with the crayons. You may not poke anyone with a crayon.” Teacher walks away.
- **Offering choices** – choices are given in a situation when a child is misbehaving or is having difficulty with another child. A choice is only given when it is an option. When things are expected, choices are not given. For example, children are expected to clean up, to listen to the teacher, to go home at the end of the day... Child wants to go to the sand table but it is full. The child is angry. Teacher says, “You may go to blocks or art.” If the child does not choose, the teacher repeats the choices and that is all that is said. Sometimes, the teacher may add, “If you do not make a choice, I will make it for you.” Child takes a car from another child in the block area. It is the only one. The other child just started playing with the car and is crying. Teacher will give two or three other items as choices for the child to play with. The teacher may give the child the option of setting a timer for the car or waiting for the car.
- **First, Then** – first, then is a simple strategy used when children want to jump ahead to a preferred activity and not follow the class expectation. The child leaves centers at clean up time and joins in the music activity on the rug. The teacher would go to the child and state, “First clean up the toys, then music.” This strategy is often used with pictures of expected behaviors and activities.
- **Rule reminders** – school staff reminds children of the classroom and school rules when a child is acting inappropriately. “The rule at school is we run outside, we walk in the school. I expect you to walk inside the school.

- **Removal from a situation or area** – at times, the above methods are unsuccessful. Some children need more adult support to manage behavior or calm down. This could include separating children who are not getting along, having a child sit or move to an area of the classroom, away from stimulation, to calm. If a child will not go on their own, a staff member may need to assist them with physical guidance. This is not considered time out. It is time to calm, or regroup, in order to get back to the activity. Staff will use strategies to help the child relax and be able to think reasonably. In the event that a child is lacking self-control or may harm themselves or others, temporary restraint or removal from the classroom may be needed.
- **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, non harmful behavior management system designed to provide the best possible care, welfare, safety and security for individuals presenting a range of crisis behaviors.

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 is always taken into consideration.

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS NEWSLETTER and CORRESPONDENCE

A weekly program newsletter is sent home with students or sent via an online platform. Children will also 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. We welcome communication!

COVID 19

Covid 19 caused many things to change in our classroom program. The classroom teacher will provide you with the latest updates based on current IDPH policies in the event of an outbreak. Current practice continues to mandate a quarantine for 5 calendar days. Please feel free to send your child with a mask(s). We will continue to clean, wash hands, and sanitize as much as possible.

CURRICULUM

This classroom uses a standards-based curriculum. We will plan using the Illinois Birth to Three learning standards and the Illinois Early Learning standards. This includes:

- reviewing data to determine where our students are performing
- use the standards to determine what skills we should target
- decide what materials and instruction will be best to meet student needs

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 (not flip flops) and socks are strongly recommended for safety reasons.

ELIGIBILITY

This program was developed to address specialized needs of preschool students eligible for special education. These students demonstrated needs that weren't able to fully be met in a blended or self contained early childhood classroom. We target preschool-age students with a diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum who have significant educational needs in the areas of communication, cognition, socialization, and sensorimotor/physical skills. Considerations for eligibility include an Autism Spectrum Diagnosis, 50% delays in skills in at least two areas of development. Clinical judgment may be used. Additionally, the IEP team recommends specific strategies, therapy, or environmental considerations not available in the current placement. Exit criteria considered to recommend a change to a less restrictive setting:

- the gap between current functioning and age appropriate skills decreases to a 30% delay or less
- the students show readiness for peer interactions
- the student shows readiness for less 1:1 or 2:1 instruction and more group instruction/participation

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. All outside doors are locked.

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. If your child's HOME school district is closed due to weather, they will NOT transport on these days due to safety concerns. If the Eureka school district is closed, our class will not meet. *Check with your child's teacher regarding communication about closings.*

FAMILY SUPPORT, CONNECTIONS, and CONFERENCES

WCSEA has a Parent Advisory Council that meets monthly with representatives from districts and WCSEA Administration. All parents are invited to these meetings. **“Family Connections” are held nearly every month with your classroom team.** You will receive a time for the day of the Family Connections to either come in person or meet online via google or zoom. The purpose of these monthly meetings is to have frequent, detailed communication about your child’s progress. All providers will participate in these meetings. You will also have additional opportunities to meet with program staff regarding any techniques or specifics (sensory, communication devices) for your child, as needed. IEP meetings are scheduled once per year, or more, as needed. The main IEP meeting yearly is the “Annual Review”. The annual review is when we do an overall review of data and progress and set new goals and service/placement recommendations.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

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.**

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 COVID 19 or Influenza A or B, specific protocols must be followed as required by the Illinois Department of Public Health. These will be explained to you, if applicable.

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 (no 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

Our program has a transition process for all children who are in their last year of preschool. During the second semester, we will have conversations with you about Kindergarten placement options, visits to see classrooms, and preparations for the student and staff.

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.

PHILOSOPHY

The Bright Beginnings program follows **the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC)** guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices and 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 led 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.

PLAY PROJECT

The Play Project is an evidenced-based, intensive, early intervention for children who have a diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum developed by Dr. Richard Solomon (Ann Arbor, MI). We are not Play Project certified therapists and do not implement the program in its entirety. Our staff have participated in training to use Play Project “influenced” methods and strategies. We are committed to continuing further training in the Play Project. 4 Principles of the Play Project include:

- Fun with People - by doing what the child loves, the child will want to interact. What the child finds fun changes as more interaction leads to developmental progress.
- Put in the Time - Children with ASD have a lot of potential; to unlock their potential requires time and engagement through play sessions.
- Accurately Profile the Child - Play activities are individualized based on your child’s unique abilities, interests, and development.
- Play at the Right Level - By individualizing, we meet your child where they are at.

PROGRAM PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

This program was developed to address needs of preschool students that weren’t able to fully be met in their current blended or self contained early childhood classroom. Objectives include:

- provide a therapeutic classroom environment with low staff to student ratio
- integrate, co-taught speech and occupational therapies (other therapies as determined)
- develop behavioral intervention plans and support
- establish and build a communication system for each student
- provide direct instruction using play based and structured teaching methodologies
- build foundational and functional skills for students to improve performance at school, home, and in the community
- provide ongoing communication with families so they fully understand the progress of their child as well as understand sensory, behavior, and communication strategies

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

We follow the Eureka District #140 school calendar with some deviations. A calendar will be furnished to parents upon enrollment. Any changes will be clearly communicated in advance.

SNACKS

A small snack is offered each day with water. 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. Some parents prefer to send a snack for their child each day and this is perfectly acceptable.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Staff are properly licensed and trained. All staff have had a criminal background check including fingerprinting. Staff participate in continuing education through coursework or teacher education workshops. All staff completed a series of training, specific to this program, prior to the first day of school.

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 OUT OF THE PROGRAM 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.