



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.

AGE LIMIT

The preschool program serves students ages 3, 4, and 5 (if not Kindergarten age-eligible). The Illinois State Board of Education prohibits any child who is age eligible for kindergarten (five years old on or before September 1 of each year) from staying an extra year in preschool.

ARRIVAL AND PICK UP

Established times have been set by each teacher for students to arrive at school and be picked up at school. Staff are 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.

ASSESSMENT

The classroom program utilizes authentic assessment to gather, record, and report information about children's development and progress. Actual samples of work, pictures, 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.

ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to be at school every day unless they are sick 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 explain the local district policy of phoning in absences and providing a doctor's note for extended absences. The health guidelines listed in the handbook mirror your school district health guidelines.

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.

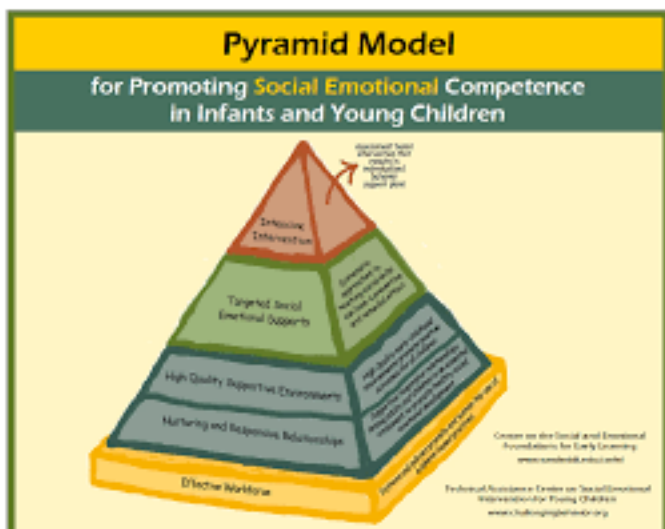
1. Students are expected to demonstrate regular school attendance. This includes arriving on time for school each day and being picked up on time each day.
2. Parents are expected to follow district procedures and communicate absences.
3. If a pattern of absences develops during the school year, the 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.

BACKPACK

The 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 backpack every day. 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 lessons are conducted to target specific needs using a social emotional learning curriculum.
5. Some children receive more intensive social skills instruction based on data/need shown in the classroom.

Social emotional and behavior management strategies are based on the belief that preschool children can begin to understand and maintain a reasonable behavior and follow the school rules set by the school staff. Children learn consequences for actions and choices. We work on children learning their responsibility as a member of the classroom community. Our classrooms have the same basic rules, focusing on respect, kindness, and becoming responsible. 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. All children need some help managing big feelings from time to time!

- **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 learn to delay gratification by waiting their turn, sharing materials, listening to the ideas of others, and managing their emotions such as excitability, disappointment, frustration, and anger. Staff will use books, discussions, practice, and modeling to reinforce self-control. Strategies to self-calm include counting slowly, deep breathing, taking a break in a quiet space, or using sensory items like a weighted blanket.
- **Responsibility** - children learn to clean up after themselves. They learn to wash their hands and take care of their hygiene needs as much as possible. Children learn to take care of their belongings and the belongings in their classroom.
- **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 behavior.
- **Crisis Prevention Intervention** - All staff are trained yearly in CPI. 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 assisting a child who is dysregulated. The goal is to get to a state of being calm.

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. WCSEA also has a specialized classroom for students who have needs that aren't able to be met in the blended setting.

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.

CHILD CUSTODY

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. The teacher will inform necessary staff within the school setting.

CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

Expect some form of weekly communication from your child's teacher. Most teachers use a classroom website or social media 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 during school hours. Any communication after school hours will be handled the next school day. Please be respectful of staff time outside of school.

CLASSROOM VOLUNTEERS AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to support the classroom in many ways. Each classroom welcomes parents or a family member to help out in the classroom. Each teacher has different ways they like parents to help (bringing a special snack, doing a craft, reading to the class...). Talk to your child's teacher about volunteering at your Back to School visit.

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 to a higher level by applying methods that promote independence, curiosity, decision-making, cooperation, persistence, creativity, and problem solving in young children.

Our curriculum features learning in the areas of (1) Approaches to Learning, (2) Social and Emotional Development, (3) Physical Development and Health, (4) Language, Literacy, and Communication, (5) Math, (6) Creative Arts, (7) Science and Technology, and (8) Social Studies.

Our program also uses the Illinois Early Learning Standards and The Illinois Early Learning Guidelines. You can learn more about these at isbe.net.

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, begins to understand the 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
- 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, explore, and even get a little dirty from time to time. The best shoes are athletic shoes with socks. Crocs and sandals present safety concerns. We witness many trips and falls when a student wears shoes other than what is recommended by the teacher. Wood chips and mulch also wreak havoc on bare feet in Crocs and sandals.

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 prohibits any child who is age eligible for kindergarten (five years old on or before September 1 of each year) from staying an extra year in preschool.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Fire and tornado emergency procedures are practiced in the classroom on a regular 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. Districts have a central door to enter and all other doors are locked. All visitors must be let in from office staff using a buzzer/intercom system. All visitors must register in the school office. Schools require that visitors wear a visitor's badge.

Your child's teacher will let you know how unplanned school cancellations (severe weather) are communicated to families. School districts make every effort to have children attend school. However, if current or forecasted weather conditions may risk lives, school may be closed or dismissed early so your child may return home safely. If the weather conditions are questionable and school is in session, you can always decide to keep your child home. Their absence will be excused.

FAMILY SUPPORT

WCSEA has a Parent Advisory Council that meets 3 times per year with representatives from districts and WCSEA Administration. Parents are welcome to attend. Teachers send home periodic family activities to do with your child. Preschool parents are encouraged to attend "all school" social events (book fair, ice cream social...). Information will be provided to you.

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, email threads, or meetings. 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 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 but may impose an even higher standard of illness exclusion. This is due to the age and nature of preschoolers, who often can't completely care for runny noses, etc. Since the learning environment is hands-on, germs from hands and mouths spread easily. If symptoms of illness are present, staff will contact parents or the emergency designee. 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?

A school classroom is no place for a sick child. Please keep children home who have recently been sick, are sick, or just aren't feeling well and may be coming down with something.

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 (must wait 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 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 are concerned about a particular injury or complaint from a child, parents/emergency designees will be contacted by phone. Incidents requiring medical attention will 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. 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 once per year. Student progress toward goals and objectives on their IEP will be reviewed and recommendations for the next school year will be discussed.

PROGRAM 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, 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 calendar 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 preschool 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 verification of income. These are all requirements of the Illinois School Code. These, along with the general registration forms for our program must be on file prior to the child starting school.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

The Bright Beginnings Program follows the majority 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 program (PreK) ends 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). 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. Specific information about snacks will be shared at the Back to School event.

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 participate 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 become as independent as possible for personal hygiene and dressing. Please dress your child in clothing that is easy to take off and put 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 some children have a long bus ride.

TRANSITION INTO THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

All parents will be provided a program handbook, link for registration, and information needed to enroll their child in school. A mandatory orientation visit (parent and child) will be scheduled and staff will explain the classroom day and get to meet one another.. Bussing arrangements (if provided) are made at this time. Any special circumstances that will help a child transition into the program will be discussed at this time.

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 loved, 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.