

# Pre-Kindergarten Addendum to your School's Family Handbook

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Welcome to Pre-kindergarten!

Welcome to the Washington Central Unified Union School District (WCUUSD) and your local elementary school. Our pre-kindergarten programs are part of the local elementary schools which serve students in grades Pre-K through 6. We are looking forward to working and playing with your child in the classroom and having your family involved in our learning activities.

## **Our Program Philosophy**

WCUUSD believes that a high-quality early childhood setting provides a safe and nurturing environment to promote a young child's mastery of skills in the areas of social/emotional, physical, language and cognitive development. Individual differences are anticipated and planned for within an inclusive classroom setting. Through meaningful opportunities for children to reach their highest potential, children become active members of a caring community of learners. Our early childhood programs foster family involvement and support developing relationships between children, families, childhood peers, and school personnel.

## **About Our Programs**

The WCUUSD pre-kindergartens serve children ages three to five who live in the towns of Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex, and Worcester. Our main objective is to provide a positive atmosphere to promote the social, physical, intellectual, and emotional growth of your child. We believe children learn by doing. We also believe children learn through play. Pre-kindergarten offers an environment for children to learn and grow through active exploration and interaction with adults, peers, and materials. Pre-k offers a variety of learning areas that include: dramatic play, blocks, science, early literacy and language, early math, art, music, and motor activities. Children work individually, in small groups and in large groups. Teachers facilitate children's involvement through encouragement and positive modeling. Teachers match and respect each child's developing abilities and recognize each child as an individual by supporting their overall development. Teachers are currently licensed in Early Childhood Education by the State of Vermont. Other staff members meet the requirements of highly qualified para educators.

All of our pre-kindergarten programs have achieved quality recognition through Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System, or STARS, and are licensed by the VT Department of Children and Families.

The WCUUSD pre-kindergarten curriculum is based on NAEYC's Curriculum Standards for Developmentally Appropriate Practices for teaching and learning in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. In addition, the *Vermont Early Learning Standards* (2015), a companion guide to the *Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*, provide more specific guidance for teachers related to the content and skills that

become the base of experiences for children in a wide variety of curriculum areas. As required by Act 62, Vermont's law regarding pre-kindergarten education, students will be assessed using the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment tool. This assessment tool also informs classroom practices.

### **Inclusion through Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)**

WCUUSD pre-kindergartens are inclusive educational environments. The Early Childhood Special Education Program serves young children with special needs in each of the WCUUSD towns. Children must demonstrate a medical need or a significant delay in one or more areas of development such as small and large muscle development, social and emotional development, speech and language, self-help or adaptive skills, or cognitive skills. When children are identified as having special needs, a team that includes parents, the ECSE teacher, the classroom teacher, and administrator, and special services providers meets to plan for the child's education and create an individualized education plan (IEP).

### **Extra Support**

Children who may need extra support in the pre-kindergarten program to better prepare them for kindergarten may work with the ECSE teachers. The ECSE teachers work with children, often in small groups, to expand on developmental skills, such as gross motor, fine motor, self-help, concepts, and speech and language skills on an as-needed basis. The ECSE teachers also collaborate with the classroom teacher to ensure that all children are successful in the classroom.

The ECSE teachers can also help families in accessing outside resources, such as Head Start, child care, and medical, dental, or mental health providers.

### **Contacting Teachers and the Principal**

We value our interaction with parents and believe that through open communication, we will best be able to meet the needs of your child(ren). Please feel free to contact us either in person before or after class time, by phone, through email, or through a note. We will get back to you as soon as possible.

### **Pre-Kindergarten Hours and Calendar**

Pre-kindergarten programs operate on the WCUUSD school calendar. If WCSU is closed due to weather or other reasons the pre-kindergarten is also closed. If there is a delayed opening, the pre-kindergarten may be delayed or closed in the morning. Please listen to the local radio stations or check the local Vermont television stations for cancellations. Please note that in the case of bad weather resulting in an early school closure, you will be notified by the school. Each school may have different program hours please check with your town's Principal or Teacher on the delay or closure policy.

### **Absences / Arrivals and Dismissals**

Please call the school if your child will be late or absent. If you know in advance that your child will be absent, please send a note to school. If we receive no notice from you, we will contact you to ensure that your child is in your care. When your child returns after an absence, please send a note stating the reason for the absence, if this information has not been communicated previously.

If your child comes to school late, he/she must sign in at the front office (or be signed in by a parent/guardian). Students should check in with the cafeteria or school office if they need to sign up for lunch/snack, as outlined in the Family Handbook (as applicable).

If your family attends CC please include them when you email or make contact regarding an absence, late arrival or early dismissal.

### **Arrival and Dismissal in Pre-Kindergarten**

Upon arrival and pick-up, please sign your child in and out on the daily attendance chart. The sign-in/sign-out chart will be located by the classroom door. Please request assistance from the pre-k staff for further clarification.

Parents who bring their children to the pre-k room may be asked to help them with their outerwear. Check with your child's teacher regarding specific arrival and dismissal procedures.

A parent must notify the teacher in writing, if someone other than a parent is picking up your child. A child will not be released until the teacher or principal receives verification from the parent.

Should your child ride the bus home (if applicable), it is the policy of the bus company that a pre-k child must be met by an authorized adult. If there is no authorized adult present when the bus arrives at the stop, the pre-k student will be returned to the school.

### **Separation or Saying "Goodbye"**

Many children find it hard at first to say goodbye to their parents when coming to school. We encourage you to spend at least part of a morning visiting the pre-kindergarten with your child before you bring him/her to stay alone. Try to act confident in yourself. If you seem anxious and unsure about leaving your child at school, your child will pick up on those feelings and start to wonder if there is something to be worried about. We have also found that careful discussion of school with children at home relieves their anxiety about beginning or coming to school. It is helpful to tell them how often they will attend pre-k, how long they will be there, and when you will be back to get them. Plan on staying for 5-10 minutes the first couple of days looking around the room and playing with your child. A longer or shorter amount of time may make separation harder. We do ask that you say goodbye to your child when you are leaving, even though this may produce a fresh flood of tears and protests. In our experience, "sneaking out" while children are engaged in play may lead to greater separation anxiety on the child's part. We also ask that when you say goodbye you follow through and leave, so that your child develops a sense of predictability. Separation can be hard for children, but regular routine and honesty on the

parents' part make it easier. Remember that many teachers are parents and have been through this themselves. Rarely have we seen a child cry for a long time. Rest assured that by the time you get to your car, your child will be busy and happy. If your child is having an especially hard time, please be assured that we will call you at home or at work.

### **Schedule of the Day**

Each day provides time for play, projects, a circle time, snack, and outdoor play (weather permitting). Generally, the sequence of the scheduled activities is followed consistently; however, it may change due to weather, activity level of the group, special projects, and availability of other programs in the building.

### **Classroom Cubbies**

Each child is provided with a cubby and/or a hook for keeping outdoor clothing, extra clothes, finished artwork, and other treasures. Please send in a complete change of clothing (including socks and underwear). An extra sweater or a t-shirt may come in handy for our fickle Vermont weather.

### **Clothing**

Please remember that our pre-kindergarten students love to get messy! As such, play clothes are recommended. Children should come dressed for the day in clothing that does not hamper their free activity. We spend part of almost every day outside, so please supply your child with outerwear appropriate to the season and the weather – sweater, coat, raincoat, snow pants, snow boots, mud boots, hat, mittens, etc. Please label all items!

We often have a number of children with the same boots, sneakers, etc. We also encourage children to bring backpacks to school daily. It is helpful if the backpack is large enough to contain snow clothes, art work, and parent notes. The backpacks with wheels work well for three-and four-year olds.

### **Snack**

Each elementary school has its own procedure for snack. Your child's pre-kindergarten teacher will provide more information about snack time at your school.

Universally, we feel that good nutrition is crucial to every child's well-being. We encourage simple nutritious snacks including: fresh fruit, cheese, pretzels, crackers, non-sweetened cereal, dried fruit, yogurt, muffins, bagels or apple sauce.

Some of our students have severe food allergies. Should there be a child with food allergies in your child's classroom, you will be informed as necessary.

### **Toys**

Books and materials that relate to topics that are being explored are generally welcome, as are items such as fall leaves, seashells, found treasures or mementos from a trip. Some children may have a need to bring a security blanket or a stuffed toy especially in the fall when the school routine is new. In general though, toys should be left at home.

We discourage your children from playing with weapons. In no instance may children bring toy guns or other weapons to school.

### **Illness**

In group settings such as ours, infections spread rapidly. For that reason we urge parents to observe the following guidelines if your child seems sick and you're trying to decide whether to send him/her to school on a particular day. If your child has had any of the following symptoms in the past 24 hours, please do not send him/her to school:

1. fever
2. conjunctivitis (pinkeye)
3. unexplained rash
4. diarrhea
5. vomiting
6. severe cold (please remember that if your child has a thick colored discharge from his/her nose, it is considered an infection and he/she should not be at school)
7. contagious or infectious diseases such as: bronchitis, strep throat, measles (red or German), chicken pox, mumps, roseola, etc.
8. infestations, such as lice or scabies, contact the nurse for treatment options

A child must be on medication and free of fever and vomiting for any of the above illnesses if deemed necessary for at least 24 hours and/or be medically improved before returning to school.

If your child develops a fever or other symptoms during school hours, your child may be brought to the school nurse. If necessary, we will call you to ask that you take your child home.

### **Immunizations**

In compliance with Vermont child care regulations, we require that parents provide evidence of their child's immunizations at the time of registration, according to the Vermont immunization schedule unless exempted for medical, religious, or moral reasons. These immunization records are updated annually and monitored by our school nurses.

### **Holidays**

Our pre-kindergarten programs respect diversity of all kinds. We also believe in the importance of traditions. Holidays are special times when families celebrate and pass on traditions to children. We will plan and create celebrations at various intervals during the year with the children. We enjoy celebrating children's birthdays and learning about other holidays that may be special to individual families.

We recognize that customs and traditions among pre-k families are diverse; therefore, we do not sponsor or endorse any particular set of holiday practices. In addition, we do not emphasize the religious aspects of traditional holidays.

Please talk to the staff about any concerns you may have about classroom celebrations and holidays.

### **Discipline**

The pre-kindergarten program is designed to foster a safe, fair, nurturing environment in which children learn to express their feelings, communicate clearly, and develop creative solutions to conflict. Learning to deal with conflict fairly and to treat each other with kindness is part of the natural growth process of children. The purpose of discipline is to guide and encourage, which is a learning process.

We encourage self-discipline and ask the children to respect themselves, others, and school property. We model, role-play, and teach the children alternative methods of solving a problem. The teacher may take the child aside to calm down and prepare to return to the group.

Teachers will communicate regularly with parents about their own child's progress in these areas. They cannot speak specifically about the behavior of other children.

*The Preschool program discipline practices are aligned with district wide Responsive Classroom and PBIS practices for this age group.*

### **Parent Participation**

Parents are always welcome and encouraged to visit school and participate in their child's daily activities. Some ways that parents can be involved include:

- visiting class, possibly to share a story, a musical instrument or to do an activity relating to a project
- sending messages to children in their mailboxes

In addition, parents participate by:

- keeping informed by reading newsletters and taking note of our documentation panels and notices on the parent communication board
- sharing their understanding, joy, and frustrations regarding their child's development
- contributing ideas, questions or resources
- completing the annual parent survey each spring

Watch for the teacher's regular newsletter to come home with lots of information about classroom activities, great ideas for home, finger plays, recipes, and other information.

Parent-teacher conferences will be held in the fall and again in the spring. In addition, we encourage parents to speak with their child's teacher regularly during drop-off and pick-up times. We ask parents to inform us of any unusual conditions that we should be aware of in order to help us interact with and support your child (i.e. parent away, emotional upset, sleepless nights, etc.) during the school day.

### **Student Records and Confidentiality**

The WCUUSD pre-kindergartens follow the federal legislation known as FERPA (Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act). In addition, each of our schools has adopted a policy related to parents' rights regarding confidentiality.

In general, this means that parents and legal guardians of children have the right to review their child's records and request copies of specific documents. If you have concerns about any documents in your child's file, you may request to have them removed or provide a written explanation to accompany the documents. In terms of confidentiality, the school will not share specific information about your child with outside agencies or providers without your specific written permission. Within the school, information will be shared with other educators on a "need to know" basis.

More information about these matters is contained in your school's Family Handbook.

### **Responsibilities for Child Welfare and Safety**

It is our responsibility to inform you of the Vermont statutory requirements on child abuse and neglect.

The Agency of Human Services Department for Children and Families/Child Development Division Licensing Regulations require all staff, as mandated reporters, to report any suspected instances of abuse or neglect to the appropriate state agency.

### **Smoke Free Environments**

All WCUUSD schools are smoke free environments in accordance with Vermont statutes. Smoking is not allowed anywhere on school grounds at any of our schools.

### **Field Trips**

A field trip is a hands-on addition to the educational experience. We try to take trips to supplement our learning themes at school. Notices will go home in advance of field trips. Each school is different so check with your classroom teacher for specifics. In general:

Volunteers will be needed to help chaperone the trips. If transportation other than a bus is used, all children must be in the proper child restraint system for their age/weight. No child is permitted in the front seat with functional air bags. Drivers on the trip will need a valid driver's license and the vehicle shall be registered and insured according to state law. If you are driving a

child which is not your own, there must be two adults in the car at all times. All volunteers in the classroom or as a driver, must have a volunteer application and a criminal background check Level 1 before permitted to be with children.

### **Concerns and Complaints**

We want to hear from you if you have a concern or complaint that you believe we should address. WCUUSD school policies ask that you first address your concern to the employee involved. If your concern is not adequately resolved through this process, please take your concern to the school's principal. If your concern is not adequately addressed at this level, please contact WCUUSD Superintendent, Meagan Roy, at 802-229-0553

### **Additional Pre-Kindergarten Information**

WCUUSD and each of our elementary schools have websites with information for parents regarding school programs and policies. You can access our websites using the following addresses:

<http://www.wcsu32.org/>

<http://berlinschool.org/>

<http://www.calaisschool.org/>

<http://www.dotyschool.org/>

<http://emontpelierschool.org/>

<http://www.rumney.org/>

In addition, you can find general information regarding Vermont child care regulations and STARS accreditation at the following websites:

Vermont Licensing Regulations

<http://www.state.vt.us/srs/childcare/licensing/license.htm>

Information regarding STARS Accreditation

<http://www.dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/stars>

Finally, the Child Care Consumer Concern Line telephone number is 1-800-540-7942