Kindergarten 101 & Parent Frequently Asked Questions

A Message from Willow Grove Principal, Jenny Smith:
Welcome to Willow Grove Early Learning Center! The first day of kindergarten is a great milestone for your child. We hope that this overview will help you acclimate to our routines and answer any questions you may have. We are thrilled to be teaching your child as they begin an exciting new school year. On behalf of the Willow Grove staff and myself, we welcome you and want you to know that we will do everything we can to make your child's early learning experience successful and one that ignites a love for school and learning.

Office

Jenny Smith, Principal	jsmith@kcsd96.org
Megan Payne, Assistant Principal	mpayne@kcsd96.org
Cristina Castro, Admin Assistant	ccastro@kcsd96.org
Kathleen Brady, Office Clerk	kbrady@kcsd96.org
Megan Osinski-Ealey, School Nurse	mosinski-ealey@kcsd96.org
Main office and 24-Hour Attendance Line	(847) 541-3660; Attendance: ext. 3

Important Dates: As we near the school year, information will be shared about our August Meet the Teacher event and Curriculum Night. Our first Principal's Message is the first Friday of August when this information will be shared.

Communication

- ENews: District weekly message to your email. Includes district-wide information.
- Principal's Message: Weekly message sent to your email. Includes building news, events, and links to PTO information.
- Website http://www.kcsd96.org/wg

Kindergarten School Hours
8:40 AM - 3:05 PM

Arrival
When children arrive at school they enter through a door in the front of the school for parent drop-off. Parents may not enter the school during our drop-off procedures for the safety of our students. Children who ride the bus are met by an adult at their bus and additional staff greet them and help them into the building and to classrooms. Children in the Clubhouse program before and after the park-district program are dismissed and supported by adults, as well. Our hallways are filled with staff welcoming and supporting children. We teach students morning check-in routines, helping them become more and more independent with arrival routines.
If you are dropping your child off, please park on Checker Drive and bring them to the designated door in the front of the building. Do not park in our circle drive, over any crosswalk, or in front of the fire hydrant. Our doors open to children at 8:25 a.m., with our official start to school at 8:40 a.m. This time for students to transition into their day provides a calming start to a child's day. It's important to note that parents dropping off their child are not allowed to escort their children to their homeroom, for the security of our building. Also, if a child is tardy to school, parents must bring their child into the office and sign them in.

Bus assignments and times are emailed to parents as we get closer to the start of school before the August "Meet the Teacher" event.

Attendance
When children enter their classroom, teachers have attendance routines in place to account for all children. Absences and late starts need to be called into our office or 24-hour attendance line by parents. Do not email, as this is not a reliable way for us to receive this message in a timely and orderly manner. There are resources related to health and wellness guidelines on our district website.

Recess
Recess is 20 minutes, daily. We have a beautiful space for children to play that includes equipment, grassy areas, and a blacktop area. Students have outdoor recess during each school day except in the most inclement weather. Please make sure your child is prepared for very cold weather throughout the cold months, as they do go outside nearly daily. When the temperature, including wind chill, is below 10 degrees, students will have an abbreviated outdoor recess or indoor recess. To play in the snow, students must be prepared with mittens/gloves, snow pants, boots, and a hat/hood. If they don't have the required snow clothing, they play on the cleared blacktop area. If families choose, children may keep a set of the required items to play in the snow at school in their cubby throughout the winter months. Parents may not have their child stay in for recess when they choose. This requires a doctor's note. We do not have supervision adequate to allow for this.

Lunch
Part of a student's morning routine is to choose what they are having for lunch or indicate if they brought lunch from home. If a student is purchasing a lunch from school, they also select their choice of entrée. All students have a "debit-like" bar-coded card assigned to them for purchasing lunch. These remain at school. Students use their cards in the lunchroom if they order a hot lunch or just a drink, which students bringing a lunch from home may still access. Students only have their lunch cards in their possession through the lunch line process; adults manage the storage, distribution, and collection of the lunch cards.

If your child is bringing lunch from home, you may pack any food you'd like. Our School Nurse and I will work with families to support children who have food allergies to maintain a safe environment for the child. It is very much appreciated to consider the way in which you pack cold lunch items. Please choose containers that are easy for your child to open and prepare foods in a way that is easy for your child to consume, such as cutting fruit. Practice having lunch from a lunchbox with your child before the start of school.

The lunch period is 25 minutes in length. We support the children to learn these routines and they do very well! Throughout lunch there are many staff on hand circulating amongst the tables to support children in any way they need. Children are walked back to their classrooms after lunch.

Daily Snack
All children are provided an opportunity for snack daily, which families choose and provide for their child from the *District 96 Approved Daily Snack List*. This list is reviewed each summer for safety and will be available online as we get closer to the school year. Snacks that are not from this approved list will not be permitted and will be sent home. If packing a lunch from home for your child, snacks must be packed separately from your child's lunch. Children may bring water bottles from home, however, know that they do have access to our drinking fountains. If you do send a water bottle in, our requirement is that it is not glass and does not have an open spout. Water bottles must have a flip-up straw, sports bottle top, or any non-spill top. Children may not take water bottles from place to place, including from class to lunch. If you want a water bottle in your child's lunch and accessible from class, pack one daily in their lunchbox and another for the classroom.



Departure
At dismissal, bus students are walked to lines where attendance is taken for each bus. They are then escorted by a teacher to the bus. You must meet your child at their bus drop-off point, near the street. Do not stand in your garage or a great distance away from the curb. The driver must see the adult or they will continue on their route. If there is a change in who will be meeting your child at their bus stop, please notify us ahead of time, as early as possible. Bus drivers may not release children to others who have not been arranged directly with the school by the parent or guardian. If a bus is running late, we do our best to notify parents through our texting/email messenger system.

Parent pick-up students are walked to the parent pick-up line and parents retrieve their children from the main office entryway. If someone other than yourself or another specified caregiver will be picking your child up, please inform the office, telling us who the person is. Never park in the front circle drive or along access drive curbs; these are for buses or emergency vehicles only.

Some families utilize the Buffalo Grove Park District program, Clubhouse. These students are walked to our cafeteria for after-school care.

Clothing/Shoes
Children are encouraged to dress themselves for going outdoors, change shoes for PE, and independently use the bathroom. Students should wear coats/jackets that they can put on and zip/button up by themselves; this minimizes frustration and builds independence. We will always help them to make sure they are properly dressed for outdoor weather. A change of clothes is also necessary to have at school in case of accidents or spills. Please send an extra set of clothes in a large, clear zip lock bag labeled with your child's name. We have gym every day, and we ask that children have an extra pair of gym shoes at school. Label everything.

Birthdays
Food is not permitted to be shared with the class. If you choose to send something in to recognize your child's birthday, non-disruptive and safe non-food items are acceptable (pencils, erasers, party store favors, etc.).

PTO Volunteer Opportunities
The Willow Grove Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) wants YOU! Our PTO plans and organizes many wonderful events and fundraisers throughout the year including: Pizza Bingo, Monthly Dessert Days and Dinner Mingle Nights, Scholastic Book Fair, creating the yearbook, Family Picnic, Staff Appreciation, Movie Night, Ice Cream Social, and so much MORE! If you would like to help with any of these events/fundraisers, learn more about them, or are curious to hear about other wonderful PTO opportunities, please contact **willowgroveschoolpto@gmail.com.** Any amount of help you can give would be beneficial and appreciated. We are looking forward to hearing from you!

School Supplies

Click here to see our school supply list. Bring the supplies to Meet the Teacher. If you ordered a supply kit through our PTO, it will be delivered to your home prior to Meet the Teacher. If you are interested in purchasing a supply kit through our PTO, you may do so HERE with the code kcs096 or our zip code 60089. You'll select "Kildeer" and it will take you to the list for "Grade K" for kindergarten. Do not purchase special/unique supplies or individually label them as most things go into a communal bin (other than a lunchbox, backpack, headphones, and gym shoes).

Frequently Asked Questions

Transportation

What do I do if I need to change my child's after-school transportation plan?

Changes to your child's afternoon transportation routine must be provided to the school by a phone call (**not email**) by 2:00 PM, or at least an hour before dismissal. Children attending Willow Grove may change from bus to parent pick-up, however, we cannot accommodate temporary changes to place a child back on a bus route if your routine plans are different. If your child routinely takes the bus, do not come to parent pick-up without first notifying the school. Coming at parent pick-up time without first having notified us delays our transportation routines greatly. You will be asked to meet your child at home.

Can I have my child get off at a different stop or have them ride a different bus?

Students attending Willow Grove are not allowed to ride a bus other than the one to which they have been assigned, or to leave the bus at a bus stop other than their assigned bus stop under any circumstances.

What should I do if I need to change my child's morning transportation plan?

We do not need to know if your child's arrival transportation routine is changing. Any way you choose to get your child to school is fine. We ask that you are on time, arriving between 8:25-8:40 a.m. The earlier, the better!

What do I do if I find out there was a dispute between my child and another when on the bus?

Part of growing up is learning to navigate social situations where we may not agree, independently. Talk to your child and guide them around decision-making. If you continue to have concerns, email/call the principal or assistant principal. If you ever have a major concern, always reach out to the principal or assistant principal.

What do I do if my child's bus didn't show up or seems really late?

Please know that weather and traffic conditions can delay buses, just as they do cars in traffic. We do our best to notify parents when we have learned of a particular circumstance. If you are concerned, call our building to speak with our front office, or our business office at (847) 459-4260, ext. 8001, and we'll help figure out what is going on. You may also email transportation@kcsd96.org.

Our district website has a link to parent Frequently Asked Questions for transportation with a lot of valuable information. Click here!

Lunch

How do I pay for a school-purchased lunch?

You will receive detailed information about this in August, prior to the school year starting.

Can my child access the school lunch on different days?

Your child's lunch purchasing schedule may vary. You may change each day if you'd like your child to receive the school lunch or bring a lunch.

What if my child has food allergies?

We take food allergies very seriously and have precautions in place for children with life-threatening allergies. We have peanut-free tables if parents choose to have their child use that. Parents of children with life-threatening food allergies should contact the school nurse before school starts for any questions/concerns. Unlike lunch, children may not bring in anything they want for Daily Snack, as those are consumed in the classroom.

May my child bring a water bottle to lunch?

Yes, you may send water with your child. It should be packed inside the child's lunchbox. If you want your child to have a water bottle in class and at lunch, you need to have two water bottles. Disposable water bottles are permitted at lunch, but not to be used during the school day. See "Daily Snack" for further information on water bottles.

Can my child heat their lunch from home at school?
No, there are no microwaves available for children. If you would like to pack warm food, a thermos is recommended.

Are the lunches from home kept cold?
We do not refrigerate lunches from home. Please use an insulated bag and an ice pack.

My family follows a specific diet. Can the school help my child manage this with their school lunch choices?
We cannot monitor children's choices for family lifestyle health preferences. There are too many dietary preferences for us to manage this. Our suggestion would be to preview our menu with your child and discuss the choices with your child and what you would like them to have, or pack a lunch from home.

The First Days of School and Separation Anxiety

The first day of school is a big milestone, bringing excitement and, at times, a little nervousness for both children and parents—especially if your child is experiencing separation anxiety. We want to reassure you that this is completely normal, and we're here to help make the transition as smooth as possible.

We know that many parents wonder if they can walk their child to their classroom. While we understand the desire to do so, we are unable to accommodate this request. For security reasons and to help all students settle into their new environment, we focus on creating a calm and consistent arrival routine from the very first day. Sometimes, prolonging goodbyes—while done with the best intentions—can make the transition more difficult for children. Our staff is ready to provide a warm and reassuring welcome to each child, helping them start their day with confidence.

Here are a few suggestions to support your child's transition into Willow Grove in those first few days:

- **Prepare them for the morning routine.** Talking to your child about what to expect can be very reassuring. You might say something like, *"Tomorrow, we're going to school! You'll see lots of children getting dropped off or arriving on buses. When it's time, the teachers and principal will welcome you and help you get to your classroom, where you'll have a great day! After school, I'll be waiting to hear all about it."*

- **Keep goodbyes short and reassuring.** It's natural for some children to have a hard time saying goodbye, but a confident and loving farewell can help them adjust more quickly. If your child is struggling, our staff will be there to support them. Most children settle into their day quickly, but if we ever feel a child is having an especially difficult time, we will reach out to you.

- **Begin your regular routine from day one.** While the first day of school is a special occasion, keeping the drop-off routine as close to their daily schedule as possible helps children adjust. If your child will be taking the bus regularly, we encourage starting this on the first day. You can still celebrate the milestone at home with a special breakfast, a book about starting school, or lots of hugs and encouragement. If there are any changes to your child's pick-up routine, please be sure to notify the school in advance.

- **Trust the process and know that your child is in good hands.** We understand that the first day of school can bring big emotions for parents too. Children take cues from the adults around them, so showing confidence in their ability to handle this new experience can be very reassuring. If possible, try to stay positive and composed until your child is on their way inside—it helps them feel secure and ready for their day.

The first few weeks of school come with a lot of new routines, and we appreciate your patience as everything settles into place. There may be a few bumps—tears, late buses, or extra traffic—but soon, the school day will feel familiar and comfortable for everyone.

We're excited for the year ahead and can't wait to help your child feel safe, happy, and ready to learn. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out. Thank you for your support—we are looking forward to a fantastic school year!