# EarlyChildhood

Columbia Heights Public Schools

PreK 3 • ECFE • Early Childhood Screening • Home Visits

# PREK 3 HANDBOOK

# 2025-2026

**Welcome to Early Childhood Programs in Columbia Heights Public Schools! We look forward to working with you and your child(ren)! This handbook is to assist you in understanding our philosophy, practice and procedures. It outlines what you may expect from our Early Childhood Education programs and provides information that will be helpful to you throughout the year.**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

We, the Early Childhood staff, are committed to serving all families through support, education, empowerment, and advocacy. We strive to help families achieve their individual goals in their own unique style. We recognize that families and society change and we will be flexible and respond in ways that promote healthy families. Our goal is to provide a positive, developmentally appropriate introduction to the school setting and ongoing support for all family members.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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**Family Center website at https://fc.colheights.k12.mn.us/**
**CHPS 2025-2026 Calendar https://www.colheights.k12.mn.us/calendar**

## FAMILY CENTER PROGRAMS

Family Center 1460 49th Avenue NE (enter in Door #2), Columbia Heights, MN 55421

**Early Childhood Family Education**
Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth and kindergarten enrollment. It recognizes that families provide children's first and most important learning environments and parents are children's first and most significant teachers. The purpose of the Early Childhood Family Education program is to provide parenting education to support children's learning and development. Classes meet once per week, with some classes age-specific and some multi-age.

**Why involve parents/guardians?**
Research shows that early childhood programs involving both parents/guardians and children are more effective than programs centering exclusively on the child. Educators and psychologists contend that it is vital for early childhood programs to assist parents in their role as primary educators of their children. Involving families before kindergarten enrollment encourages parents to play an active role in their children's learning in the elementary years and beyond.

**Early Childhood Screening**
Early Childhood Screening is required before children attend kindergarten and is required for all PreK programming. Early Childhood Screening is a developmental screening that helps a school district identify children who may benefit from district and community resources. Through the screening process, parents/guardians discuss their concerns and find out about resources. Children are eligible to be screened at age 3, and screening is FREE. Call 763-528-4517 to schedule your appointment.

**Early Childhood Special Education**
Children are able to receive educational services from the Early Childhood Special Education program in the district. Home-based instruction and classroom instruction are offered. For more information on how to arrange a developmental evaluation for your child or any other questions you may have, call 763-528-4518 or contact Help Me Grow at http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/index.htm.

**One-to-One Visits**
A licensed Family Educator will set up personalized visits with you in the home, school, or public space. Visits can be by phone or video, too. You will have a chance to share your concerns, ask questions, and receive information about how children grow and develop, learning opportunities, and community resources. The educator may bring materials and activities as needed, along with setting goals with families. Call 763-528-4536 for more information or complete this interest form: https://forms.gle/F2qvnnRT3RdzHjAqA

**PreK**
PreK focuses on students aged three and four years. The purpose of a Prekindergarten program is to prepare children to enter kindergarten. The program enhances children's learning, development, and future success in school through a variety of educational activities and enriched play experiences. Family engagement is essential to your child's success in school. You are your child's first and most important teacher, and we support you in that role. We offer opportunities throughout the year for families to engage with their children in school.

**Family Center Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)**
The Family Center PTO is composed of parents/guardians involved in the Family Center's programs. The council meets monthly to provide input and feedback about programming and community needs, plan events, and raise funding for classroom materials. Please contact the Early Childhood Coordinator at 763-528-4518 for more information and/or to join!

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Absences**
Please contact classroom teachers if your child will be absent. Contact through Seesaw or by phone.

**Attendance**
Consistent attendance is important in our Early Childhood Programming. For PreK3, if your child is absent for 2 full weeks of programming without communication about a reason for their absence, we will unenroll your child from the program to allow for children on the waitlist to join. Connect with our staff via phone, email, or SeeSaw if you know of any absences from class that you may have.

**Badges for Parents/Guardians**
For security and safety purposes, the Family Center doors are locked at all times. You will receive a parent/guardian badge that you will need to show the front desk staff upon entering the building. On your first day, please have your state-issued driver's license or ID ready to show the front desk staff. They will scan your license photo and create a security badge for you to use while dropping off and picking up. Please keep this with you and show it to the front desk person each time you pick up/drop off your child(ren). If you forget this badge or if there is an alternate person (who does not have a badge) dropping off/picking up your child, you/they will need to stop at the front desk in order to obtain a temporary name badge.

**Dates and Hours of Operation**
Dates and hours vary- please reference the CHPS calendar and individual class schedules during the school year and summer.

**Fees**
All PreK 3-year-long classes require a $25 registration fee (one per family). Activities and drop-in class fees are low-cost or free. All PreK 3 fees are based on a sliding fee scale and are due monthly. Financial assistance is available for those who qualify. Please keep accounts in good standing, as a delinquent account is grounds for termination from the program.

**Food and Nutrition**
We believe that nutrition is very important for health and learning, because children who are given a variety of healthy food options during early childhood are more likely to continue healthy eating habits when they are older. We strive to provide a school environment that promotes and protects students' health, well-being, and ability to learn by supporting healthy eating choices. Children need a variety of healthy foods, especially fruit, vegetables, and whole grains, with limited access to high sugar and high-fat foods.

Snacks will take place during the PreK 3 class. Teachers will share a list at the beginning of the year of bulk snacks that parents can purchase and donate.

We ask that you not bring food to share for celebrations, including birthdays. Please consider celebrating by donating a book or other non-food item (stickers, pencils, etc.)

**Inclement Weather Procedures**
In the event of severe weather, ECFE will follow the procedures listed below:

- **If the school district is closed, Early Childhood programs are closed.** School closings are announced on the following: the district website, CHPS social media accounts, KARE-11 TV (Channel 11), WCCO-TV (Channel 4), and KSTP-TV (Channel 5). Please note: The Columbia Heights School District stands alone and is not a part of any other school district. When listening to school closings, specifically listen for mention of the "Columbia Heights School District" or "Columbia Heights Public Schools."

- If the school district is opening late, Early Childhood morning programming will be canceled. All afternoon programming will meet as scheduled.
- If the school district closes early, during the school day, Early Childhood programming will close at the same time, with any remaining classes being canceled.

There is no reduction of fees or refunds given if Early Childhood programming is closed due to the weather. Classes will not be rescheduled.

**Lockdown/Tornado/Fire Drills**
Each school in the district is required, by law, to conduct lockdown drills each year to determine how a crisis situation might be handled if one should occur at our school. Fire and tornado drills occur multiple times a year, too. Drills are a necessary part of preparing for possible emergencies. We do this to ensure that all students and staff are safe, and we take appropriate steps to deal with each situation. In the event of a drill, please be patient if you are on school grounds. ***Please note: if you are in the school during a drill, we ask that you do not take your child away from the class, as we need to make sure all children are safe and accounted for.***

**Parental Access**
Any child's parent or legal guardian will be allowed access to the parent's or legal guardian's child at any time while the child is in our program, unless otherwise stated in a court order. Court order documentation needs to be provided to the Coordinator.

**Parking**
Please park in the Family Center Parking Lot. Please **do not park** in any numbered reserved spots in the U-Shaped drive or at the curb in front of the building. For the safety of all children, do not leave children unattended in vehicles and hold onto your child's hands in the parking lot and on the sidewalks.

**Registration**
Registration information is located on the PreK 3 website and/or can be provided by the Community Education Administrative Assistant at the Family Center front desk.

**Registration Information Changes**
For safety reasons, it is imperative that children's files include current data at all times. Should a change occur to address, telephone numbers, employer, emergency contact information, or other data, please let your child's educator know of these changes.

**Registration Requirements for PreK 3**

1. Student Information Form
2. Copy of Birth Certificate
3. Emergency/Authorized Pick Up Form
4. Racial/Ethnicity Form
5. Early Education Student Form
6. Copy of Current Immunization Record
7. Scholarship Information (if applicable)
8. Educational Benefits
9. Early Childhood Screening

**All children enrolled in Pre-K 3 are required to be screened through Early Childhood Screening. Please contact the office at 763-528-4517 to schedule**.

**Visitors to the Program**

Due to liability and staffing, children registered in the program may not bring friends or guests to the program who are not registered.

## CLASSROOM INFORMATION

**As You Arrive for Class**

**We ask that you refrain from cell phone use in the presence of your child, whether in the classroom or the hallway**.

- Hooks or cubbies are provided for coats. They are located in the hallway near your classroom.
- Please do not bring toys and/or valuable items from home to PreK classes. (You may bring a "security" item to help ease separation anxiety if needed.) If a toy from home is inadvertently brought to class, you will be asked to set it aside until after class. Per school district policy, objects or toys resembling weapons of any kind are not permitted on school property; such items will not be allowed in PreK 3.
- Some activities may be messy; please dress your child accordingly.
- There will be other district staff, including the Early Childhood Coordinator, who may attend or observe classes. We utilize mentoring and coaching experiences in our classrooms. We also provide opportunities for student teachers to work in the classes.

**Behavior Practices**

The following is a description of model and behavior practices staff are expected to utilize in all classrooms:

- Develop and nurture positive relationships
- Provide supportive environments. This includes the use of schedules, visuals, group times, planned transitional activities, and clear rules created mutually and posted in the room.
- The intentional teaching of social-emotional skills through the following strategies:
    - Developing friendships/positive relationships through the use of greetings and learning the names of peers.
    - Teaching of emotional words/feelings.
    - Teaching children how to recognize feelings
    - Teaching the skills of how to calm down.
    - Teaching the skills of how to control anger and impulses.
    - Teaching and supporting students in learning how to problem solve.
    - Supporting children in practicing their solutions with one another: share, take turns, play together, ignore, say "please stop", get an adult, get a timer, say "please", and trade.

We will work with families to support children who may have challenging behaviors by creating plans and incorporating strategies in the home and in the classroom.

If a child endangers self and/or others, de-escalation strategies will be used. Depending on the severity, the child may be moved away from other children until the child is calm and not endangering self/others. Administrative staff may determine, with classroom staff, that a situation warrants the parent/guardian to pick up the child from the program. The program reserves the right to make this determination.

**Cell Phones**

**We ask that you refrain from cell phone use in the presence of your child whether in the classroom or the hallway.**

**Outdoor Play**

Outdoor play is an important part of our PreK program. We plan to spend time outside every day (weather permitting). Please have your child dressed in appropriate clothing, including footwear. It is recommended to have athletic shoes available and discouraged to have children wear flip-flop sandals for safety reasons. Winter gear includes: snow pants, boots, mittens (not gloves), hats, and coats.

**Release of Children**

**Your child will be released only to the people listed on your authorized pick-up form**. Staff are required to ask for identification from anyone unfamiliar attempting to pick up your child. If an unauthorized person attempts to pick up your child, you will be contacted. If you cannot be reached, your child will be held until you or your emergency contact arrives. Please notify the PreK teacher if you want to authorize additional adults to pick up your child.

**Room and Program Rules/Expectations**

Rules for group time and room rules may vary. Expectations in the building, field trips, busing, and playground times may vary. Staff will provide rules and expectations to parents/guardians.

**Separation**

Learning to separate is a necessary part of growth and development for families, and can be difficult for both children and parents/guardians. By working together, we can help children move more smoothly through this transition. These tips may be helpful:

1. Always tell your child that you are leaving and will come back. Your child needs to trust you and the staff.
2. Tell your child where you are going. Explain how long you will be gone.
3. Leave something special with your child. A "lovey," blanket, special toy, or book works well. A family picture or something your child identifies with you, such as your sweater, can also be helpful. Please label with your child's name.
4. Talk with your child about feelings. "I see you're upset (worried, angry, etc.). We will keep you safe."
5. Get your child involved in an activity or with a staff member.
6. Finally, with a confident smile, say, "I am leaving," or "I'll be back soon." Then <u>leave</u>. If necessary, you can physically hand over your child to a staff member.
7. When you do return, greet your child with a smile and a tone of confidence. "See, I came back. I told you I would."

**Student Pick Up**
Students must be picked up by the end of class time by an authorized person. Morning class ends at 10:30 a.m. and afternoon class ends at 2 p.m.. After the first time of late pick up, parents/guardians will be reminded about the importance of prompt pick up. After the second time of late pick up, parents/guardians will be informed that if there is one more infraction with a late pick up that the student will be dropped from the class roster and may be added to the waiting list. After the third time of late pick up, the parent/guardian will be informed that the student will be dropped from the class and may be put on the waiting list. The reason for this strict adherence to the pick up time is to respect the teacher's time for classroom preparation and other teacher duties outside of student instructional time. There are not staff available to supervise students who are picked up late. It is also difficult for students to see their classmates picked up and it causes the student distress.

**Toilet/Bathroom Independence**
Most children are ready to start toilet learning between 22 and 30 months of age. We define toilet independence as having the ability to notify an adult when they need to use the bathroom, pulling pants up and down, wiping independently, and cleaning hands after using the toilet. PreK staff can assist students in PreK as needed. Please provide a change of clothes in case of an accident.

**Weather Policy**
No outside play time if the temperature is below zero degrees F or if the wind chill is below zero. 0 – 10 degrees F temperature and/or wind chill: up to 10 minutes outside.

## HEALTH

**Is my child well enough to go to class?**
Many parents/guardians are frequently concerned about when their child should stay home or attend class. Remember that a child ill with an infectious disease can spread the disease when in contact with others in the family and the community.

The following information is intended to help with this decision:

- Diarrhea: exclude from program until diarrhea-free for 24 hours
- Vomiting: exclude from program until vomit-free for 24 hours
- Persistent cough or breathing difficulty
- Cold-related runny nose (green or yellow mucus)
- Ringworm: exclude from the program for 24 hours after antibiotic treatment begins
- Undiagnosed rash or contagious rash
- Lice: exclude from the program until the first treatment is completed
- Pink eye (conjunctivitis) or eyes with pus or mucus draining from them: exclude from program until treated or cleared
- Fever of 100 degrees or more: exclude from program until fever-free without medication for 24 hours
- Sore throat, especially with fever or swollen glands
- Unusually tired, pale, lack of appetite, difficult to wake, confused, or irritable
- Streptococcal: exclude from the program until 24 hours after treatment begins and the child is without fever

- Hand, foot, and mouth disease: exclude from program until fever-free for 24 hours

When children are ill in class, an attempt is made to first contact the parents/guardians and then the name listed on the student's emergency information. If you have any questions regarding the above information or your child's illness, please call your child's educator or family physician.

**Allergies/Medical Conditions**
Parents/guardians need to indicate if their child(ren) has an allergy or medical condition during registration. It is important that staff be informed as to the nature and severity of the allergy/condition. Some conditions will require a medical plan from your child's doctor.

A child's allergy information must be available at all times, including on-site, when on fieldtrips, or during transportation. Food allergy information must be readily available to staff in the area where food is prepared and served to the child.

**Communicable Diseases** (Please notify the school if your child has any of the following contagious conditions.)

- **Chickenpox (Varicella)**: Chickenpox is a viral illness. The symptoms include a rash beginning as red bumps turning into blisters, and possibly a fever. Exclusion from school is until all blisters have dried and formed scabs, about 6 days after the onset of the rash.
- **Fifth Disease**: Fifth disease is a mild, common viral rash illness. Early symptoms are generally mild and may include a sore throat or low-grade fever. When the rash develops, it often appears on the cheeks (a slapped cheek look) and moves to the arms, upper body, buttocks, and legs. The rash on the body appears fine, lacy, and pink is more pronounced with exposure to heat or sunlight. Exclusion from school is only if a fever is present.
- **Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease**: Hand, Foot, and Mouth disease is a viral infection causing a blister-like rash. Symptoms include a low-grade fever, sores/blisters on hands, feet, in the mouth, and sometimes on the buttocks. Exclusion from school is until the fever is gone and the child is well enough for routine activities.
- **Impetigo**: Impetigo is a contagious bacterial skin infection that often occurs on the nose, arms, legs, or around the mouth. Sores begin as small fluid-filled blisters, but rupture quickly, producing a thick golden-yellow discharge that dries, crusts, and sticks to the skin. This infection is common in young children and is easily spread from person to person by touching the fluid from the sores. Exclusion from school is until 24 hours after treatment begins and sores are drying.
- **Influenza-like Illness**: Influenza-like Illness is described as symptoms of a cough or sore throat and a fever of 100 degrees or greater. The recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are that children can return to school *24 hours after their fever is gone without fever-reducing medication*, and they are feeling well enough to participate in school. Flu symptoms may last 5-7 days.
- **Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)**: Pink eye is a common infection involving redness of the inner eyelids. Symptoms include redness, itching, pain, and drainage from the eyes. Not all children are sent home from school because their eyes appear red. Red eyes can be the result of a common cold, allergies, irritants, or a viral or bacterial infection. Whether or not they are sent

home depends on the cause of the redness, the age of the child, and whether they have a fever or other symptoms. Exclusion from school until treated or cleared.

- **Ringworm**: Ringworm is a fungal infection of the body, scalp, hair, or feet. Ringworm on the body appears as flat, spreading, ring-shaped areas on the skin. If lesions can be covered, no exclusion. If lesions cannot be covered, exclusion from school is for 24 hours after treatment begins.
- **Scabies**: Scabies is an infestation of the skin caused by a tiny, insect-like animal called a mite. The female mite burrows under the skin to lay her eggs. Symptoms include intense itching (especially at night) and a rash of pink bumps or tiny blisters, most commonly seen between the fingers, on the hands, knees, elbows, armpits, and around the waist. Exclusion from school is for 24 hours after treatment begins.
- **Strep Infections**: Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever (a strep infection with a rash) are common bacterial infections in young children. Symptoms of strep throat often include a fever, red sore throat, and swollen glands. Headache, nausea, and stomach pain may also be more common in children. If your child is positive for strep, they must be on antibiotics for 24 hours and fever-free before they can return to school.
- **Whooping Cough (Pertussis)**: Whooping Cough is a persistent bacterial cough illness. Common symptoms include a cough that occurs in sudden, uncontrollable bursts, high-pitched whooping sounds, and vomiting after a coughing spell. Exclusion from school is until they have finished five days of antibiotics, unless they have been coughing for more than three weeks. Whooping Cough is a reportable disease through the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).

**Emergencies**

The Early Childhood program will take whatever emergency measures are judged necessary for the care and protection of your child while they are under our supervision. In case of a medical emergency, a child may be transported to an appropriate medical facility by the local emergency resources before the parents, the child's physician, and/or other adults acting on the parents' behalf are notified. Any expenses incurred in emergency care will be the responsibility of the child's family.

**Hand and Toy Washing**

In order to help in the health of all participants, please wash your child's hands at the beginning and end of each class. This has been shown to significantly cut down transmission of the common cold and other germs! Many diseases are carried in mucus and saliva. Using a disinfectant, the staff washes toys and tables before and after snack. The staff assists children in washing their hands before snacks.

**Immunizations**

Minnesota law requires that all school children be immunized, allowing for certain specified exemptions. Before beginning classes, proof of immunizations must be provided. Children may not attend programming without immunizations. Low-cost immunizations are available in each county through Public Health.

**Nurse**

The Columbia Heights Public Schools has a district nurse available to answer questions or concerns as needed. The District Nurse can be reached at 763-528-4580.

**Mandated Reporting**
**It's a state law that all staff must report any suspected child abuse or neglect to County Social Services or Law Enforcement.**

**Employment and Services Criminal History Background Checks – Notice to Parents and Guardians**

The school district has adopted a policy, the purpose of which is to promote the physical, social, and psychological well-being of the students. According to this policy, the school district shall seek criminal history background checks for all applicants who receive an offer of employment with the school district. The school district also shall seek criminal history background checks for all individuals who are offered the opportunity to provide athletic coaching services or other extracurricular academic coaching services to the school district, regardless of whether compensation is paid. These positions include, but are not limited to, all athletic coaches, extracurricular academic coaches, assistants, and advisors. The school district may elect to seek criminal history background checks for other volunteers, independent contractors, and student employees.

**School Board Policies**
For a complete listing of school board policies, please see the Columbia Heights School District Website: ***www.colheights.k12.mn.us*** under School Board. For Directory Information of student photos and information, please see Policy 515.