Gateway Regional School District
Preschool Handbook
2025-2026



Table of Contents:

Mission Statement	page 2
Administration Contact Info.	page 3
Program Description and hours	page 4-5
Transportation	page 6
Preschool Staff & Therapists	page 6-7
School Closings	page 7
What to Bring & Wear	page 7-8
General Classroom Policies	page 8
Snack and Lunch	page 9
Volunteer/ Parent involvement Information	page 9-10
Family-School Communication	page 11
Health Services and Illness Protocols	page 11-12
Emergency Drills	page 12 -13
Behavior Management Policy	page 13-14
Registration Protocol	page 15-17

Mission Statement

The mission of the Gateway Regional School District Integrated Preschool programs is to provide safe and challenging learning experiences for a diverse student population in a language rich environment accessible to all children.

The Integrated Preschool Programs provide innovative services to children through a high quality integrated classroom program in a developmentally appropriate educational setting that fosters the growth of each child supporting social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development.

Statement of Inclusion

The Gateway Regional School District reaffirms that it does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, gender identity, transgender, age, disability, sexual orientation, or exercise of civil rights in admission to, access to, treatment in or employment in its programs or activities.

Gateway Regional School District prohibits discrimination in all of its classrooms.

Students with special needs have individual education plans (IEPs) developed with input from parents or guardians, teachers, specialists, and administrators. Services are delivered in the general education classroom setting whenever appropriate and in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the child to meet success.



ADMINISTRATION CONTACT INFORMATION

Superintendent Office
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Chester Elementary School Nurse
Amanda Dean
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Gateway Regional School Nurse
Theresa Brownlee
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Program Description

The Gateway Regional School District's Integrated Preschool Programs serve both children with and without disabilities. All programs provide high-quality, language-based, and developmentally appropriate early childhood experiences that comply with guidelines from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The Preschools join children ages three and four that have special education needs with peer partners. The purpose of this collaboration is to support children with developmental delays while they learn skills from their peer partners and encourage peer partners to discover and accept diverse ability levels. The goals of the program are to help all children to develop independence, use language to share ideas, express feelings and solve problems and to build muscle through active play, to express themselves creatively through art, music, and movement, and to acquire the pre-academic readiness skills needed for kindergarten.

Classrooms are play based and divided into centers such as: dramatic play, blocks, puzzles/manipulatives, art/writing, texture table, library, science, etc. During circle time teachers introduce new concepts and review previously learned information including the calendar, schedule, weather, songs and stories. There are times for free play and structured activities. Instruction takes place in small and large group settings. The children go outside daily, weather permitting; each preschool site has a safe fenced-in early childhood playground.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the preschool, children must have a disability, requiring placement on an IEP, **OR** be selected as a peer partner through a lottery system from registrations generated by the preschool screenings each spring. Children must reside within the district, be three years old on or before September 1, and participate in preschool screening. Preference for peer partners is given to four year olds. There are limited spaces available.

Program Options

There are 4 preschool classrooms in the Gateway Regional School District. There are two classrooms in the Chester Elementary School, and two Littleville Elementary classrooms housed in the Gateway Regional School Building.

Full Day Session:

- Monday-Friday
- 8:35a.m.-3:35 p.m.

Half Day Session:

- Monday-Thursday
- Morning: 8:35-11:35 am.
- Afternoon: 12:30-3:30 p.m.

*Children need to be 4 years old on or before September 1 for enrollment in the full day program.

Cost: There is no cost for the preschool programs

When the service is available, families may opt to have their child attend a before and/or after school “wrap around” program for a fee. They will need to contact the Westfield YMCA directly for enrollment and cost information.



Transportation

Families must provide their own transportation to and from preschool.



Transportation is ONLY provided for preschool students who require it due to a documented disability which requires specialized transportation. Specialized transportation must be approved by both Team decision and the Director of Pupil Services and be reflected on their IEP. Specialized transportation is arranged through the Department of Pupil Services.

Preschool Staffing

All preschool classrooms are staffed with a Massachusetts Certified teacher in Early Childhood and/or Special Education. Each classroom also has a minimum of one paraprofessional. Additional paraprofessionals may be assigned to a classroom based on the age of the children and/or special needs of the children.

Specialists such as Occupational Therapists (OT), Physical Therapists (PT), and Speech and Language Therapists (SLP), Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA), and School Adjustment Counselors (SAC) also provide services to some of the children on as needed basis both in and out of the preschool classrooms. The district further employs Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI), Orientation and Mobility Specialists (O & M), Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing (TOD/HH) and English Language Learners (ELL) instructors. The district will contract with consultants with unique certifications based on the appropriate needs of children and team decisions. Full time nursing staff are located in all school buildings.

On occasion, college students may come to observe within the classroom and/or participate in a practicum/student teaching experience. In addition, the preschool at the high school will have high school students who are taking child development coursework utilize that program to conduct observations and participation hours. Any

additional adults within the classroom will need to complete a CORI form. All information regarding the children is kept confidential.



Preschool Closings

School Cancellations: If school is canceled or delayed due to inclement weather it will be listed on local TV stations and posted on the district's website. Families who have filled out the necessary paperwork will also receive an automated phone call regarding the cancellation.

If there is a 2 hour delay the morning preschool is canceled. The full day preschool will begin at 10:35 and the afternoon preschool will start at the regular time (12:30 p.m.).

If there is a scheduled early release or an early release due to inclement weather, the afternoon preschool will be canceled.

What to Bring

Each child should bring a backpack to school large enough to carry essential items but small enough for him/her to carry it independently. Please put a complete change of clothes in a plastic bag and keep it in your child's backpack in case he/she has an accident. Please don't worry if he/she does, toileting accidents are common at this age. In addition, the children sometimes spill food or drink on themselves and require a new shirt, etc.

Your child's classroom teacher will send a class letter letting you know what other items they may need (e.g. lunch box). Preschoolers do not need to buy school supplies such as crayons, etc.

What to Wear to Preschool

Please send your child to school in play-friendly, washable clothes. We paint, spill, and do messy art projects. Sneakers are the most appropriate footwear for active children. Open toes, open heels, and flip flops do NOT allow safe play on the playground.

Please dress your child for the weather. On warm sunny days, please apply sunscreen prior to coming to school. Hats and visors can be worn outside.

During colder weather children need a warm coat, hat, and mittens. We go outside daily unless the weather is below 16 degrees fahrenheit. When the ground is snow covered the children need snow boots and snow pants plus a pair of shoes for indoors. Scarves can be a choking hazard and are best left at home.

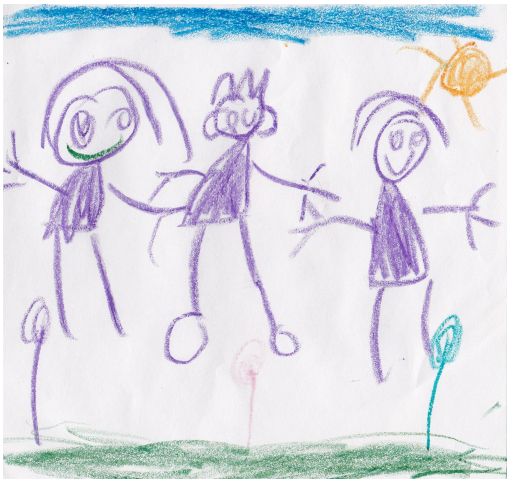
General Classroom Policies



Toys from home: Children often want to bring in toys from home to school, which can be problematic as a prized possession could easily get lost or broken and children often have trouble sharing toys from home. For this reason, please refrain from sending in toys from home unless told otherwise by your child's teacher.

Birthday parties: Birthdays are a very exciting time in the lives of young children. To avoid hurt feelings, if invitations are to be given out in school, ALL children must be included. If only a few of the children in the class are to be invited, arrangements must be made to distribute them outside of the school setting. Children are welcome to bring in a special treat to celebrate unless otherwise directed by your child's teacher; please be considerate of any dietary needs.

Holidays: The preschool curriculum does not revolve around religious holidays. However, some books may contain some holiday themes. We will do our best to be sensitive to all cultures and beliefs. Please talk to your classroom teacher about any specific traditions or beliefs that you feel they should be aware of.



Breakfast, Snack and Lunch

Breakfast: Children attending the full day/hybrid classrooms are offered breakfast from the cafeteria each day.

Snack: Families are responsible for providing a nutritious snack and drink for their child each day. Please also include a napkin and any necessary utensils.

Lunch: Children attending the full day preschools will eat lunch each day. Families will have the option to get a hot lunch from the cafeteria and/or bring lunch from home.

Allergies: Please let your classroom teacher and the school nurse know of any food allergies that your child has. Families will be notified if an individual preschool classroom needs to be designated as a nut/peanut free environment.

Volunteering

All volunteers must have a criminal record (CORI) check completed before volunteering. Paperwork for the CORI can be obtained at the Superintendent's Office. Completed CORI forms should be returned to the Superintendent's Office at the Gateway Regional School, located at 12 Littleville Road, for processing.

Parent Involvement Opportunities:

Special Classroom Events: Parents may be asked to volunteer to help out with special classroom events and activities such as carving pumpkins, helping with a special craft, etc. or attending a special performance.

Gateway Parent Teacher Organization (PTO): It is a group of parents and teachers who work together to expand the education experience. They support ways to enhance the curriculum such as field trips, classroom materials, etc. They organize fundraisers to fund these enhancements. All parents of elementary children (PK-5) are welcome to help out in any capacity; they are always looking for new members. Please see the principal to find out the next scheduled meeting.

Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC): It is a group of parents of children who have special needs. The SEPAC meets periodically to discuss issues important to the education of children with special needs and to participate in the planning, development, and evaluation of the district's special education programs. The Gateway SEPAC organizes parent workshops open to the community. Please contact Kurt Garivaltis, Director of Pupil Services, at kgarivaltis@grsd.org if you are interested in learning more about volunteering with the SEPAC.

School Council: It is an advising group consisting of parents, the principal, community members, and teachers. They discuss the budget and policies affecting the schools. The school council meets 3-4x/year.

School Committee: The Gateway Regional School District School Committee is a group of elected representatives from Montgomery, Huntington, Russell, Middlefield, Chester, and Blandford. It includes the Superintendent and meets on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. The School Committee deals with issues affecting the entire district. All meetings are open to the public and are held at the high school. Public comment is available at the beginning of each meeting.

Family-School Communication

Communication between families and the school is an essential part of the education process. Parents may contact their child's teacher by email, by sending in notes from home with their child or by calling the school and leaving a voicemail message. All matters will be treated confidentially. Due to the fact that the preschool teacher is frequently busy with children, she typically is not able to speak with parents during the day, but will return calls or emails before/after school.

Parents should check their child's backpack each day for information and artwork. Red folders containing important information from the office are sent home every week and should be returned on the next school day.

School wide parent/teacher conferences are scheduled in November but a parent may request a meeting at any time. Preschool Progress Reports are sent home twice a year in January and June.

Health Services and Illness Protocols

Gateway Regional School District has a full time nurse in attendance in each building during the school day. School nurses are responsible for administration of medications in school and for attending to illness and injury that occurs during the school day and for notifying parents of a child's illness beyond minor first aid. They also decide when a child is sick enough to send home or to the hospital. The nurse maintains student health records and keeps the principal informed of health activities and issues at the elementary level. Please contact the nurse whenever your child's health information needs to be updated.

Under Massachusetts General Law (M.G.L) chapter 112, section 80B, a licensed nurse must have medication order from a physician, dentist, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant in order to administer any medication, whether it is a prescription drug or over-the-counter medication. Medication Order forms are available from the health office.



Illness Policy: Children do not need to be excluded for minor illnesses. However, please do not send them to school if they are: (1) too sick to participate comfortably in program activities,
(2) have unusual lethargy, irritability, persistent crying, difficulty breathing or other signs of possible severe illness,
(3) diarrhea that can not be controlled by toilet use, contained in a diaper or occurs more than two times per day.
(4) Children should stay home if they have a fever of 100 degrees or higher. They should remain at home until they are fever free for 24 hours without the aid of fever reducing medication.
(5) Vomiting: children should remain at home until 24 hours free from symptoms
(6) Please see the Chester/Littleville Handbook on-line for more specifics regarding when a child should stay at home and/or return to school.

Mandatory Reporters: In accordance with state regulation, all faculty and administrators within the Gateway Regional School District are mandated reporters and are required to report suspected abuse or neglect to the MA Department of Children and Families.

Emergency Safety Drills



Fire Drills: School wide Fire Drills are conducted periodically throughout the school year.

Shelter in Place: Shelter in Place is designed to provide immediate increased security and/or confidentiality with minimal disruption to the educational process. During shelter in place, teachers and students continue activities within the classroom with the door closed and locked and all shades drawn.

Lock Down: Lock Down is the procedure used to secure and account for all persons in the building in the event of an imminent threat to the students and adults in the building. During a Lock Down all classrooms activities stop, the classroom door is closed and locked, shades are drawn, and the children are asked to sit quietly in a safe area of the room.

Evacuation: An Evacuation is designed to clear the building in a quick and orderly fashion to a designated location to receive further instructions regarding safety procedures.

Behavior Management Policy

The purpose of every child/adult interaction, including discipline, is to promote the child's self-esteem and self-control. An atmosphere of respect for the children is maintained at all times. Each situation calling for an intervention by an adult is seen as an opportunity to help the child increase his/her skills in cooperation and negotiation.

Adults in the classroom use positive guidance techniques, such as:

- **Modeling** appropriate behavior such as cooperation and courtesy and using "please" and "thank you".
- **Positive reinforcement** for appropriate interactions and actions
- **Redirection of a child's inappropriate behavior.** For example, reminding a child that "blocks are for building" if she is using aggressively or guiding a child who is running to a more quiet table activity.

Children are involved in establishing simple rules for social living such as "....in school we use gentle hands and helping words". When inappropriate behavior arises, the children are encouraged to problem solve. ("Can you think of a way to share that toy?").

Proactive approaches to behavior management are used in order to teach self-regulation skills and to maintain an orderly classroom. Methods include verbal praise, modeling, concise/consistent direction and use of consequences, discussion regarding appropriate choices, occasional extrinsic rewards (stickers, etc.), and daily reminders of expected

behavior. Time out may be used for physical aggression, such as hitting, biting, and pinching.

Natural consequences are employed as much as possible. For example, if a child is throwing toys in the block area, he or she might be redirected to another center. If a child is not using playground equipment safely, he/she may be asked to leave the area for a short time to calm their body.

To the extent possible, the Gateway Integrated Preschool Program works to keep children who demonstrate significant behaviors including verbal aggression, physical aggression, and signs of trauma or withdrawal in the school setting. Preschool teachers, the building principal, and the Director of Pupil Services work with parents to develop behavior plans and protocols for addressing the behaviors, provide home consultation and support where needed, and recommend further evaluation when warranted. Students are not terminated for significant behavior issues, but with parent's consent may be referred for special education evaluation and services.

Verbal or physical abuse, humiliation, sarcasm, and denial of food or activities are never used as discipline. Criticism, competition, and comparison with peers are not used to enforce the rules. Children are never punished for soiling or wetting their clothes and/or for not using the toilet.



Gateway Regional School District
Preschool Registration Policy

Mission Statement: *Gateway Regional School District Integrated Preschool Program provides innovative services to children through a high quality, developmentally appropriate, integrated educational program that fosters the growth of each child by supporting social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development.*

Requirements for Registration:

1. **Age:**

- The preschool classrooms are composed of children who are 3-5 years old. Children must be 3 by September 1 to attend preschool.
- Children with documented disabilities who are found eligible for special education programming are exempt from the September 1st deadline and are legally entitled to begin preschool upon their 3rd birthday (regardless of when that occurs during the school year).

2. **Residence:**

- School Choice does not apply to preschool; it takes effect in kindergarten.
- Families must reside within the Gateway Regional School District; they will be asked to provide proof of residency showing that they live in Huntington, Montgomery, Russell, Blandford, Chester or Middlefield.
- Preschool children are not required to attend their "neighborhood school" and, in fact, may be placed in a different location depending on available space.

3. **Toilet training:** Although it is not a requirement for enrollment, it is strongly encouraged that children be toilet trained prior to enrolling in the preschool.
4. **Screening:**

- All children should participate in preschool screening as part of the preschool registration policy. Successfully passing the screening is not a requirement for

enrollment but the information gathered assists the school in determining the best placement for academic and social achievement of each child.

- Preschool screening is conducted in the spring (typically May) and again in the fall (September).
- Any child with a suspected disability and/or documented disability should contact their district of residence for eligibility determination.

Registration Timeline:

1. **April: Letter of Intent**

- Children who are currently enrolled in the Integrated Preschool Program, and who are not age-eligible for kindergarten, are automatically allowed to continue in the preschool.
- The aforementioned families will be asked to fill out a form letting the district know of their intention to remain in the program.
- Current Families are asked to state their preference regarding placement for the following year. Their preference is noted but not guaranteed.

2. **May: Preschool Screening**

- Families within the district will be notified via multiple means (e.g. fliers sent home through the schools, press releases, letters to those listed on the census as having a preschooler, etc.) of the specific date of screening.
- Families will sign up for a specific date/time for screening; screenings typically take about 45 minutes.
- Based on need, additional screenings may be added.

3. **May: Lottery**

- **Preference:** Children who are 4 years old by September 1st (one year before kindergarten) will be given priority for preschool peer slots. Our hope is to provide one year of free early childhood education to as many families as possible within the school district.
- **Process**:
    - If there are more registration applications than available spaces, a lottery will occur.
    - All 4 year old applications will be entered into the first lottery.
    - Applications will be randomly picked and placed in the family's first choice for location/program.
    - If their first choice is not available, they will be placed in their second choice program.
    - All 3 year old applications will be entered into the next lottery following the same procedure as above. Please note that the 3 year olds will only be placed into 1/2 day programs unless their IEP warrants full day or there are other extenuating circumstances.

    - Once all available slots are filled, applications for those who did not get their first choice placement and/or were not selected at all will be placed in a lottery to generate a waiting list.
    - The district may reserve slots for students with documented disabilities who require preschool as part of their IEP. Per legal requirements, the school district must begin to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) upon the child's 3rd birthday.

- **Wait list:** The waiting list will be kept for the duration of one school year. If your child does not come off of the waiting list; they will need to complete the preschool screening/application process again.

4. **July: Notification**
    - Families will receive a letter in the mail letting them know the results of their child's screening.
    - They will also be notified of their child's placement in the preschool program.
    - Parents are asked to call the school to accept their slot.
    - Children who do not receive a preschool slot at this time will be placed on a waiting list.

5. **August:**
    - An informational packet including beginning of year forms, etc. will be mailed to all families enrolled in the program.
    - A few days before the first day of preschool, the children will be invited to attend an hour-long orientation visit with their family.
    - Families must complete all necessary enrollment paperwork in order for their child to begin on the first day of preschool.

6. September: The preschool classrooms will begin a few days later than the rest of the school. This allows the preschool teachers to conduct home visits, have a preschool orientation, and complete fall screenings/rescreens.

7. November: In November, after the fall screening and child find process has been completed the district will have a better understanding of the upcoming enrollment numbers for the school year. At this time, additional slots may become available for those on the waiting list.