



2026 - 2027

Parent Handbook

The Dare County Schools NC Pre-K program is administered in compliance with state and federal laws. Dare County Schools administers all education programs, employment activities and admissions without discrimination against any person on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, national origin, age or disability.



NC PRE-KINDERGARTEN PARENT HANDBOOK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome 3

Mission/Goals and Attendance 4

Breakfast/Lunch, Food Allergies 5

Emotional and Social Learning 6

Family Involvement 7

Pre-K Daily Schedule (Sample) 8

Student Health: Emergency Procedures and First Aid, Medication, Illness 9

Transportation, Drop off and Pick Up Procedures 10

Curriculum and Assessment 11

Communication 12

Health and Safety 13

Inclement Weather 14

Guidance and Discipline Policy 15

Prevention of Shaken Baby and Abusive Head Trauma Policy 16

Additional Information 17

3. WELCOME

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Welcome to the Dare County Schools NC Pre-K family! Soon your child will begin one of the most exciting times in his or her life. This year will be a very important one, and the Pre-K teachers and staff are looking forward to working with your child.

We know that you trust us with your precious child. We want to assure you that we will provide your young child with a nurturing environment that encourages learning and literacy growth.

This handbook gives you an overview of the Dare County Schools NC Pre-K Program. NC-Pre-K is contracted by Dare County Schools. However, the best source for finding out more about the program is by talking with your child's teacher.

Your involvement is critical to your child's success in school, and we are pleased to partner with you to ensure your child's success!

Thank you for sharing your child with us.

Sincerely,

Tricia Nicewonger
NC Pre-K and Transition to Kindergarten Coordinator
252-480-8880 ext. 1893

Mary Bridgers
Elementary Director
252-480-8888 extension: 1954

4. MISSION AND GOALS

DCS Pre-K provides students with a developmentally appropriate educational environment that focuses on all areas of child development to build a foundation for success in Kindergarten and beyond.

The Dare County Schools Pre-Kindergarten Program/NC Pre-K provides a curriculum focused on developing each child's social, emotional, physical and academic skills in a safe, caring and friendly environment. The Pre-Kindergarten curriculum goals are to:

- Provide a child-centered and project-based approach program based on how young children learn, through their experiences (play), the environment and interactions with adults and other children.
- Provide the stepping stones for success in kindergarten.
- Involve families in their child's learning (reading with them, having conversations about what the child is learning, and other opportunities you will hear about during the year.

ATTENDANCE

NC Pre-K provides a rich, child-centered, literacy-focused program. Students enrolled in NC Pre-K are expected to attend school daily. NC Pre-K teachers record student attendance daily on their daily attendance log as required by NCDHHS. Student absences are either marked excused or unexcused.

When a child enrolled in the NC Pre-K Program is absent for more than **3 consecutive days**, the child's teacher or Site Administrator shall contact the child's parent to discuss the absences and determine whether the parent wishes the child to remain in the NC Pre-K Program. Teachers and Administrators shall document each attempt to contact the family and include decisions the child's parent makes regarding the child's continued participation in the program. Teachers or Site Administrators shall contact the local NC Pre-K Coordinator to share information related to the child's absence and to collaboratively determine what further actions may be necessary to maintain the child's attendance in the program. The Site Administrator shall not terminate a child's participation in the NC Pre-K Program before determining if barriers to the child's attendance exist and can be remedied. through assistance such as access to transportation or additional educational activities in the case of a child's illness or disability. **Families may jeopardize their enrollment for extended or chronic absenteeism.**

Extended family travel must be pre approved by Site Administrators and not exceed 10 consecutive instructional days. Exceeding 10 consecutive absences for family travel could jeopardize placement in the program.

If your child has an **IEP** and is absent 10 days consecutively with no communication from the parent or with Chronic Absences (18 or more), the EC Pre-K coordinator should be notified and an IEP meeting should be scheduled.

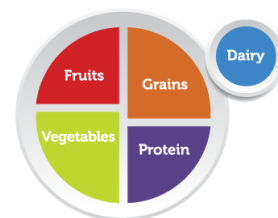
On-time arrival each day is also key to your child's success. Please make arriving on time a priority. Tardy procedures are established at all schools for handling late arrivals. Those tardy procedures may include signing your child in, getting a visitor's pass and walking him/her to the classroom.

WITHDRAWAL

If you choose to withdraw your child, please contact the Pre-K staff as soon as possible and let them know. We appreciate knowing ahead of time if you will be withdrawing your child for any reason.

5. BREAKFAST / LUNCH

- All meals and snacks served by the cafeteria meet USDA and DCDEE requirements. The kitchen staff provides free breakfast, lunch and snacks. Menus are posted outside of classrooms and are available on the Dare County Schools website.
- Families that choose to pack lunch must sign the nutrition Opt Out form, and agree to **follow the minimal nutrition guidelines** provided. (Please see DSC Pre-K meal patterns below) Lunches sent from home **must be labeled with your child's name and date each day**. Teachers are not able to heat items from your child's lunchbox



A.M. Breakfast: Provided by school nutrition. Consists of three components:

- Grain (Meat or meat alternative can be substituted for grain three times per week)
- Fruit
- Milk (unflavored only, Skim or 1%only)

P.M. Snack: Provided by school nutrition. Consists of two components:

Component 1:

Meat alternative such as cheese or yogurt
Whole grain chips, crackers, roll , muffin or cereal
Vegetable such as bagged carrots
Fruit such as bagged apples

Component 2:

100% no sugar added Juice or
Milk (unflavored only, Skim or 1%only)

***NEW- Parents may also opt to send in a snack from home. Snacks must be non-perishable and meet minimal nutritional guidelines.**

Lunch: Lunches should contain all five components of the Food Plate.

- Milk (unflavored only, Skim or 1%only) Or Milk alternatives (Soy milk, Almond Milk)
- Meat/Meat alternative (yogurt, peanut butter, Tofu, beans, cheese, eggs)
- Fruit
- Vegetable
- Grain

Items you may not send in for lunch/snack include: Soda, cookies, candy, cupcakes, cakes, energy drinks, sports drinks, "fruit" gummies or roll ups, or other sugary drinks or snacks.

FOOD ALLERGIES

- If your child has a food allergy, you must provide this **written** information from a licensed health care provider to your child's teacher. Please make sure it describes your child's specific allergic condition.
- Once documentation is received, the school will work closely with you to develop a plan that will minimize risk to the child, as well as an emergency plan in the event of an allergic reaction.
- Due to the number of peanut and tree nut related allergies, we ask parents to refrain from sending items containing peanuts or nuts in their child's lunchbox.



6. EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL LEARNING IN PRE-K

Children will form positive relationships with adults and children, learn how to express their emotions, and learn to regulate themselves. To be successful in school, children learn to use self-discipline, cooperate, share, follow directions, listen, and show respect for themselves and others. It is the responsibility of adults to help children learn these behaviors. In our NC Pre-K classrooms, this is accomplished by providing activities that encourage the development of these skills and by modeling these skills for the children. Keeping children actively engaged in learning, utilizing consistent rules, routines, and procedures, and parent support help children learn these skills.

Supporting Positive Behavior in Pre-K with the Pyramid Model

In our Pre-K classrooms, we are proud to implement the Pyramid Model, a research-based framework that supports the social-emotional development and positive behavior of young children. This approach focuses on creating a strong foundation of trust, respect, and supportive relationships in the classroom.

The Pyramid Model emphasizes teaching children the skills they need to understand and express their emotions, make positive choices, and build relationships with peers and adults. It starts with universal practices for all children, like creating a welcoming environment and setting clear expectations. Then, it provides targeted supports for children who may need additional help managing emotions or behavior, and intensive interventions for those who require more personalized guidance.

By incorporating the Pyramid Model, we aim to foster a positive learning environment where every child feels valued and empowered to succeed socially, emotionally, and academically. Together with your support, we can help your child build the foundation for lifelong success! Learn more at The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations at challengingbehavior.org.

Parents will be responsible for promoting emotional and social development by:

1. Teaching and discussing the purpose of classroom and school rules. (Children respond well to clear and consistent expectations from adults.)
2. Attending conferences at school when needed.
3. Providing structure at home and reviewing school correspondence sent home in the child's book bag.
4. Working to maintain consistent routines, such as a regular bedtime and routine (for example, reading a book before turning out the light).
5. Responding appropriately to school reports by praising and encouraging positive behavior and discussing areas that need improvement.

The Pre-K teachers, administrators and staff will promote emotional and social development by:

1. Forming positive relationships with children and parents.
2. Teaching children classroom procedures and expectations, implementing a positive reinforcement system, and supporting children's communication as they express their wants and needs.
3. Using non-verbal cues (pictures) or prompts to encourage children to correct their own behavior.
4. Using verbal cues to redirect children to make desirable choices.
5. Recognizing natural consequences and providing logical and respectful consequences.
6. Working with parents, administrators, support staff and teachers to develop and implement a behavior intervention plan, if needed.
7. Requesting support from Pre-K program personnel or making a referral to the school intervention team.

7. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Parent/Family involvement is key to your child's success in school. Parents are important to the success of our program as well. Each family is expected to attend Parent Orientation, schedule a home visit, participate in parent conferences, and participate in additional school related events. Below are some ways that you can support your child's education in Pre-K.



Families and schools can work easily together when they have the right tools. YOU are your child's first teacher, so DCS Pre-K Programs is pleased to provide parents with a FREE access to ReadyRosie!

ReadyRosie is an online resource that emails activities to adults to do with their children ages Birth - 5. Each activity is modeled with a two-minute video. The activities are short and simple. They take about two minutes and help prepare children for success in school.

Simply watch a video, do the activity modeled in the video with your child, and everyone learns something new! The activities can be done at home, in the car, at the grocery store, restaurants, or wherever real life happens. The videos come right to your mobile device, tablet, or computer. Just share your email with your classroom teacher and they will get you set up with ReadyRosie.

Raising a Reader

To help families develop daily reading routines, our classrooms participate in the Raising a Reader Program. This initiative is designed to encourage early literacy and foster a love of reading in your child. Each week, your child will bring home a red book bag filled with carefully selected books that are age-appropriate and engaging. This program provides an opportunity for you to share quality time with your child, exploring stories together and discussing the books in fun and meaningful ways.

By reading together, you are helping to strengthen your child's reading skills, vocabulary, and comprehension. Please return the bag with the books each week, and feel free to explore the books as much as you like. We hope this program inspires your family to enjoy reading and makes learning even more enjoyable!

School Visits

- Volunteering in the classroom.
- Accompanying the class on field trips.
- Attending school functions such as Raising a Reader events, Book Fairs, Parent Workshops, School Programs, and Fundraisers.
- Having lunch with your child at school.

Pyramid Model Backpack Connection Series: Supporting Your Child's Growth at Home

Each week, your child will bring home a handout from the Pyramid Model Backpack Connection Series. These handouts are designed to share simple, research-based strategies that support social, emotional, and behavioral development. The Pyramid Model practices are used in our Pre-K classrooms to help children build important skills like self-regulation, problem-solving, and positive interactions with others.

We encourage you to review the handouts with your child, as they provide helpful ideas for reinforcing these skills at home. By working together, we can create a consistent and supportive environment for your child's learning and development both at school and at home.

8. NC Pre-K Daily Schedule

This is a Sample Schedule. Daily schedules may vary by classrooms, but will contain the same components.



7:25-8:00	Arrival /Breakfast
8:00-8:20	Circle Time/Morning Meeting
8:20- 9:00	Free Choice Learning Centers/Small Group Lessons
9:00-9:30	Recess
9:30-10:15	Free Choice Learning Centers/Small Group Lessons
10:15-10:30	Large Group/ Calendar
10:30-11:00	Lunch
11:00-11:30	Recess
11:30-11:45	Music/Movement
11:45-12:15	Free Choice Learning Centers/Small Group Lessons
12:15-12:30	Story Time
12:30-1:30	Quiet Time/Nap
1:30-2:00	Snack/Pack Up/ Goodbye Song
2:00	Dismissal

*Check with your child's teacher for his/her actual daily schedule

9. STUDENT HEALTH



EMERGENCY PROCEDURES AND FIRST AID

In case of a suspected contagious disease or emergency, these procedures are followed:

- The parent is contacted by either the teacher or the school nurse.
- The parent is asked to take the child home or to a doctor.

For more serious incidents or accidents:

- The school calls 911.
- The parent is notified.

If necessary, the student is sent with an accompanying adult to the hospital of the parent's choice.

MEDICATION

ALL MEDICATION SHOULD BE GIVEN AT HOME. However, some students need medication on a regular schedule in order to receive maximum effect in treatment. In these cases, an **AUTHORIZATION FORM FOR ADMINISTERING DRUGS OR MEDICATION AT SCHOOL** Form **must be** submitted. In addition, to maintain the safety of all children:



- The Medical Authorization Form must be completed by Physician/Health Care Provider for Prescription and Over-the-Counter medications. This form must contain the name of the drug, dosage and the time interval that the medication is to be taken. This form must be signed by a physician. Medical Authorization Forms are available on the DCS Website. Additional forms are available at your school nurse's office.
- All prescription medication must be in the original container with the prescription label.
- Please **do not send medication to school with your child.** If your child needs medication, you (parent) must bring the medicine to school and give it to the school nurse. No medications will be accepted without the Medical Authorization Form.
- Children are not to handle or transport any medication. This includes lotions, ointments, sunscreen and hand sanitizer.

ILLNESS OR SICKNESS

- If your child is vomiting or has diarrhea, the child must **wait 24 hours after the last episode** of vomiting or diarrhea before returning to school.
- If your child has a fever of 100.4 degrees or more, they will be sent home from school. It is **strongly recommended** your child see a physician if this occurs. Children must be fever free **without taking medication** for 24 hours before returning to school.
- If your child has contracted head lice, you must have your child checked by a health professional before your child can return to school. Your child's head must be free of nits before he/she can return to class.

If your child becomes infected with a contagious disease, please notify the school immediately so they can notify families of other children who may have been exposed to the disease. Some contagious diseases include: flu, chicken pox, measles, pink eye, impetigo, ringworm, pinworms and head lice, or Covid 19.

10. TRANSPORTATION DROP OFF/PICK UP PROCEDURES

DCS NC PRE-K TRANSPORTATION POLICY FOR PARENTS

- A responsible adult will accompany my child to the bus stop.
- I will not send medicine to school on the bus with my child. I understand that children cannot transport any medication on the bus or in backpacks, lunch bags, coat pockets, etc. I will transport all medication to school and give it to the school nurse.
- Preschool children will sit in the front row(s) of the bus, or be seated with a sibling.
- I have provided emergency contact information for my child. If I do not provide current emergency information, my child will not be transported until it is received.
- When the bus arrives at the school, the driver will not allow the preschool children to exit the bus unless the designated school employee is available to receive them.
- When the bus arrives at the child's drop off site, the driver will not allow the preschool children to exit the bus unless the designated adult is there to receive them. **If no one is at the drop off site to receive the child, the driver will return the child to the school and deliver the child to the principal or designee.**
- Preschool children will never be left on the bus without an adult present.
- Drivers will not transport more than 20 preschoolers without additional adults present.
- I will inform school staff of any special behavioral, emotional, or physical needs of my child.
- I understand that failure to follow these policies may result in my child losing the privilege of riding the bus.
- I understand that students are expected to observe rules for safety and courtesy as outlined in Dare County Schools Code of Student Conduct. Failure to do so may result in my child losing the privilege of riding the bus.

DCS NC PRE-K DROP OFF AND PICK UP PROCEDURES

Each site has designated a specific parking area for visitors and parents. Parents or guardians who bring children to school in the mornings must park and walk them to the classroom or designated meeting spot, sign them in and let the teacher or assistant know that the child is present. Never leave the child in the classroom alone. When picking up a child, make sure the teacher or teacher assistant is made aware that the child is leaving, and the child has been signed out. Parents providing children with transportation are asked to be on time for drop-off and pick-up. On Early dismissal days we will dismiss at 11:00.

Your child will be released only to the parent(s) or other persons authorized by the parent. The designated person must show identification that matches information on file at the site. Any changes to transportation must be submitted to your child's teacher **in writing**.

15. GUIDANCE DISCIPLINE AND BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT POLICY.

Praise and positive reinforcement are effective methods of behavior management. When children engage in positive interactions with adults, they develop good self-concepts, problem solving abilities, and self-discipline. Based on this belief, our facilities will practice the following:

- Teachers model positive behavior for children.
- Teachers design the physical environment to minimize conflict.
- Teachers maintain age-appropriate expectations for children's behavior.
- Teachers provide predictable routines/set clear expectations for student behavior.
- Teachers maintain appropriate ratios and closely observe and supervise children's activities and social interactions.
- Teachers help children verbalize their feelings, frustrations and concerns.
- Teachers listen to children and respect their needs, feelings, and concerns.
- Teachers redirect children as necessary or provide alternatives for inappropriate behavior.
- Teachers do set limits and provide children with natural and logical consequences for their behavior.
- Teachers utilize effective guidance and behavior management techniques that focus on child development
- Teachers provide additional supports such as visual or auditory cues as needed.
- Teachers utilize consistent, age appropriate, culturally sensitive behavior management strategies
- Teachers provide children with opportunities to “take a break” away from the group for short periods if needed in a safe, quiet space that can be adequately supervised.
- Teachers must involve administrators if children exhibit behaviors that threaten to damage property or threaten the safety of the child or others.
- Teachers will communicate regularly with families regarding any behavior issues.

Discipline and child guidance will always be positive, productive and immediate when behavior is inappropriate. Children will never be:

- Shamed, humiliated, frightened, threatened or verbally abused.
- Subjected to physical or corporal punishment
- Disciplined for issues related to toileting, eating, resting or sleeping.
- Denied food, rest, or outdoor time as punishment.
- Isolated, left alone/unattended, or without supervision

When a pattern of behavior persists that endangers self, others or property, or significantly disrupts the program, we will work with a child's family to find solutions, up to and including referral to the Pre-K Problem solving team or other services.

16. PREVENTION OF SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME AND ABUSIVE HEAD TRAUMA POLICY

Shaken Baby Syndrome or Abusive Head Trauma (SBS/ABT) is a form of physical abuse that occurs when an infant or small child is violently shaken and/or there is trauma to the head. Shaking may last only a few seconds but can result in severe injury or even death. According to North Carolina Child Care Rule:

10A NCAC 09 .1726), each child care facility licensed to care for children up to five years of age shall develop and adopt a policy to prevent SBS/AHT.

Procedure/Practice

Recognizing:

- Children are observed for signs of abusive head trauma including:
 - Irritability and/or high pitched crying
 - Difficulty staying awake/lethargy or loss of consciousness
 - Difficulty breathing, inability to lift the head, or seizures
 - Loss of appetite or vomiting
 - No smiling or vocalization, inability of the eyes to track and/or decreased muscle tone.
 - Bruises may be found on the upper arms, rib cage, or head

Responding to:

- If SBS/ABT is suspected, staff will:
 - Call 911 immediately upon suspecting SBS/AHT and inform the director.
 - Call the parents/guardians.
 - If the child has stopped breathing, trained staff will begin pediatric CPR.

Reporting:

- Instances of suspected child maltreatment in child care are reported to Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) by calling 1-800-859-0829 or by emailing webmasterdcd@dhhs.nc.gov.
- Instances of suspected child maltreatment in the home are reported to the Dare County Department of Social Services at (252) 475-5500.

Prevention Strategies

When a child becomes distraught, first determine if the child has any physical needs such as being hungry, tired, sick. If no physical need is identified, staff will attempt one or more of the following strategies:

- Rock the child, hold the child close, or walk with the child.
- Use relaxation and breathing techniques to help calm the child.
- Sing or talk to the child in a soothing voice.
- Allow the child a safe place away from the group to self soothe.
- Let the child listen to calming music or white noise.
- Seek assistance from administrators if the child requires a space outside of the classroom to calm down.

In addition, the facility:

- Allows for staff to have a short, but relatively immediate break away from the children if necessary.
- Provides support when parents/guardians are trying to calm a crying child and encourage parents to take a break if needed.

Prohibited behaviors

Behaviors that are prohibited include (but are not limited to):

- Shaking or jerking a child
- Tossing a child into the air or into a crib, chair, or car seat
- Pushing a child into walls, doors, or furniture

All staff will be trained on SBS/AHT within first two weeks of employment.

Training includes recognizing, responding to, and reporting child abuse, neglect, or maltreatment as well as the brain development of children up to five years of age Staff review and discuss:

- Brain Development from Birth video, the National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, www.zerotothree.org/resources/156-brain-wonders-nurturing-healthy-brain-development-from-birth
- The Science of Early Childhood Development, Center on the Developing Child, developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-eed/

Parent web resources

- The American Academy of Pediatrics: www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Abusive-Head-Trauma-Shaken-Baby-Syndrome.aspx
- The National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome: <http://dontshake.org/family-resources>
- The Period of Purple Crying: <http://purplecrying.info/>

Facility web resources

- Caring for Our Children, Standard 3.4.4.3 Preventing and Identifying Shaken Baby Syndrome/Abusive Head Trauma, <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView.cfm?StdNum=3.4.4.3&+=>
- Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/kb/trprev/Preventing_SBS_508-a.pdf
- Early Development & Well-Being, Zero to Three, www.zerotothree.org/early-development

17. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL CARE

The DCS NC Pre-K Program does not provide wrap-around services. (before and after school care).

HOLIDAYS

Please refer to school board policy regarding Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Religion/Religion in Schools regarding religious celebrations. Activities, instruction, or communication which promotes religious beliefs will not be directed toward students in the Pre-K program.

MAINTAINING CURRENT INFORMATION

In the event of an emergency, it is important that your contact information on record remains accurate. Please notify your child's teacher of any address, telephone or emergency contact changes as soon as possible.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Your child will need:

- A **standard size** backpack. (No backpacks that are toddler size or have wheels.)
- A **small** blanket for nap time. This will come home each Friday to be washed and returned on Monday.
- A change of clothing (see below)

Pre-K does not **require** parents to provide school supplies. Your child's teacher will provide you with a list of classroom supplies you can choose to donate to the class if you are able.

*Please leave stuffed animals, toys, snacks, jewelry, and other items that may cause a distraction at home.



CLOTHING

As you know, young children are extremely active. Please dress your child for play and according to weather conditions. Tennis shoes or other rubber soled shoes are the safest footwear options and required. Sandals, flip flops, shoes with wheels or elevated heels are not safe for young children and therefore may not be worn to school.

Pre-K students must follow the student dress code as outlined in the Dare County Schools Student Code of Conduct. Please dress your child for success in toileting. Bottoms that are difficult to remove can cause toileting accidents. Please practice toileting independently prior to the start of school.

Parents are asked to send a complete change of clothes to school (i.e. bottom, top, socks, and underclothes). The clothes are kept in the child's individual cubby to be used in case of accidental soiling or wetness. If your child comes home with clothes provided by the school, please remember to wash and return them to school.

Please help your child practice self help skills like dressing and undressing, putting on their own coat/jacket, shoes, and fastening buttons, zippers, and snaps independently.

Footwear Policy- For reasons of safety and comfort, students need to wear athletic/ tennis shoes to school each day.

NO SMOKING OR TOBACCO/NICOTINE USE ON THE PREMISES POLICY

In compliance with North Carolina state laws and our commitment to providing a safe, healthy environment for children, staff, and visitors, smoking and the use of tobacco or nicotine products are strictly prohibited on the premises. This includes:

- Smoking of any kind, including cigarettes, cigars, and e-cigarettes (vaping)
- Use of smokeless tobacco, including chew, snuff, or any nicotine products

This policy applies to all staff, parents, guardians, visitors, and contractors while on the grounds of the childcare center, including indoor and outdoor area, or while participating in off campus activities such as field trips. We appreciate your cooperation in maintaining a healthy and safe environment for the children in our care.