



EARLY LEARNING FAMILY CENTER

3300 3RD STREET NE, GREAT FALLS, MT 59404



Handbook Procedures and District Policies 2026-2027

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Our mission is to provide the highest quality early childhood education in a secure, nurturing and stimulating environment. Our program is designed to meet the physical, emotional and intellectual needs of our youngest students and their families.

This handbook provides important information to help families understand more about the program.

Admission/Registration Procedures

There are no fees or costs for the programs.
Meals are served during breakfast and lunch at no cost.

Program admission is currently open to:

- children who turn 4 on or before September 10th
 - live within **Longfellow/Whittier/West/Sunnyside/Lewis & Clark Mountain View/Giant Springs and Loy** demographic areas
 - meet criteria for Early Literacy Targeted Intervention (School Board Policy 2165)
 - children ages 3-5 who are identified and qualify under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA), and demonstrate the need for an individual education plan. (I.E.P)
- ✓ **Registration materials** *provided by the program, completed by family
 - ✓ **Immunization records** *form from Dr. Office or clinic
 - ✓ **Birth Certificate** *copies can be made at school upon registration



Bathroom Use

We recognize that children develop differently. If your child has not been completely toilet trained, we will work with you and your child. We assess each situation on an individual basis. Accidents happen with young children. You may want to send an extra set of clothing to school. If your child comes home in clothes that belong to the school, please return the clothes to the school.

Program Hours and Daily Schedules

Because our program is designed to meet the physical, emotional and intellectual needs of young students and their families, there are a variety of classrooms at the ELF Center. Teachers will provide you with information specific to your child's program. Please read all information that comes home with your child in notes or monthly newsletters.

GFPS ELF Center Sessions:

Half-Day sessions *IDEA

AM: 8:40-11:00

PM: 12:20-2:40

Full-Day sessions

8:40 AM-2:40 PM

****Every Wednesday classes release at 2:00 PM
for all ELF Center students****

Holidays and Vacations

At the ELF Center, we will do our best to coordinate our schedules to reflect the Great Falls Public Schools' Calendar. Please take time to read the school calendar we send home and read all notes that come home in your child's backpack. Ongoing communication with families is very important to us. Please ask if you have any questions concerning days off or early dismissal.



Arrival/Dismissal Procedures

Your child's safety is of utmost importance. Please do not leave your child unattended in the classroom, playground or hallway at any time. Always wait for a staff member to be present before leaving your child. Please be prompt in picking up your child at dismissal as teachers have other work-related duties and responsibilities.

In the event your child is absent, you will receive an automated message through ParentSquare prompting you to call the office. If no contact is made, the secretary will make several attempts to call.

**If your child is not going to be in school, please notify the school secretary at
268-6400 or through ParentSquare.**

Parking

The **west side of the building** is reserved for staff and visitor parking. Handicap stickers are required to park in handicap spaces.

Please use caution when driving through the parking lot. All students being driven by families must enter through the door with the sign reading...

“Early Learning Family Center Main Entrance”

located on the west side of the building. Please walk your child into the school and sign them in. Never allow a child to walk in by themselves.

Our #1 priority is to keep the students safe!

Secure Door System

At the Elf Center all doors are locked during school hours. When you arrive, please press the button for entry into the building. SMILE-Staff in the office can hear you and see you!

Staff in the office will respond by asking:

- Your name and purpose of visit
- Once approved to enter, the door will beep and the light will turn green indicating the door is unlocked.
- You may be asked to show an ID and then report to office

Signing IN and OUT

Students must be signed **IN** (when tardy) and **OUT** (leaving early) of school each day by a parent or guardian or an authorized (by parent) responsible party. The sign in/out log is located in the main office. Students will only be released to the person(s) authorized and on record. We appreciate your help and cooperation in keeping students safe.

Visiting the classroom

Many families like to spend time in the classroom assisting the students or teacher with activities. Please let the teacher know you are interested and together a plan can be made for you to assist in your child's learning. Please sign in at the office and get a visitor sticker. This applies to all volunteers in the classrooms and on field trips. Again, we appreciate your help and cooperation in keeping students safe.



Bus Procedures

The front of the school is reserved for the bus zone. Families may **not** park or drop off their children in the bus zone. Tickets may be issued by police if cars park in the bus zone.

- Students attending full-day classrooms (6 hrs) may be transported by bus to and from the ELF Center from their home school HUB “bus stop”. An adult must put the child on/off the bus at the school they would attend for kindergarten. All children gather in a common place at each school. Families must arrive as close to bus arrival as possible. **Childcare will not be provided at the bus stop before or after school.**

- **Checking ON and OFF**

All day students will be checked **ON** and **OFF** of the bus each day by a parent or guardian or an authorized (by parent) responsible party. Students will only be released to the person(s) authorized and recorded on a form at the school. We appreciate your help and cooperation in keeping students safe.

If your child misses the bus, please call the office at 268-6400 to make staff aware.

Bus times and schedules will be distributed and are available from the teachers as well as the support staff at each school. IDEA bus times and schedules will be mailed to families.

- Students who have an active IEP may be provided bussing to and from home. Students who only receive speech therapy services on the IEP are NOT eligible for bussing. Families, please keep teachers informed of any changes in address. The teachers are responsible for requesting any changes in bus routes. Changes may take up to 10 days to go into effect. Thank you for your patience in this matter.

Breakfast/Lunch Program



Good eating habits and positive attitudes towards food should be established at an early age. In our program, breakfast, a well-balanced lunch and an afternoon snack are served.

Our program qualifies under the Community Eligibility Provision. (CEP) All students qualify to eat both breakfast and lunch free under the Community Eligibility Provision. (CEP)

We do not collect or process meal applications for free and reduced-price meals served under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

- A menu will be sent home with each child as well as posted in the classrooms.
- Please make staff aware of any known allergies.
- Students may bring their own lunch to school.

You may join us for lunch anytime! Please let program staff know if you will be eating school lunch so one can be ordered. There is a charge for adult meals.



Quiet Time Procedures

All children require some quiet time in their day; a rest from the stimulation of social interactions, educational programs and play. Rest time is an important part of their day, a time to relax and unwind in a quiet, peaceful environment.

In our program, we have a quiet time each afternoon for all full day students.

Cots are provided for each child. The cots are sanitized regularly. Students are encouraged to send a washable blanket/pillow from home to leave at school.



Illness/Health Procedures

Your child's health is important to us. We have an RN on staff, full time in our building. Please keep the school updated with current phone numbers, emergency numbers and other contact information, as well as with any changes to their health status.

Colds, flu, pinkeye and other contagious illnesses occur frequently and spread easily among children. Students will be sent home if they appear to be ill while at school. They will be removed from contact with other students and a parent/guardian will be contacted to pick them up. If a parent/guardian is not available or cannot be reached, the individual(s) listed as emergency contacts may be asked to pick the student up from school.

When to Keep Your Child Home from School

Your child should stay home from school if they have signs or symptoms of illness. This includes:

- Temperature over 100 degrees
- Nausea or vomiting
- Stomachache
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Persistent or productive cough
- Earache
- Thick yellowish discharge from the nose
- Red or pink eyes with drainage that becomes crusty
- Fatigue, loss of energy, or decrease in activity level

If symptoms persist for more than 24 hours, it is recommended that you follow up with a medical provider. Please call the school (268-6400) if your child will be absent due to illness.

They can return to school:

- When they have been fever free for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medication (i.e. Tylenol)
- When they are feeling better and show no signs of illness.
- If your child has been on antibiotics or other medication, ask the prescribing healthcare provider when they should return to school. The general rule is that children can return to school 24 hours **after** starting treatment. It is helpful to provide school with a doctor's note to clarify any restrictions.

Accidents/Injuries

In case of an accident or injury, an initial assessment will be made and first aid will be administered. If necessary, 911 will be called and the family will be notified.

Health Concerns/Conditions

Please make school staff aware of any known health concerns/conditions – including allergies, asthma, diabetes, seizures, etc – at the time of registration.

Medication at School

If your child needs to take **prescription** or long-term medication during the school day, a form will need to be completed. Forms are available in the school office. Medication must be in the original prescription container and clearly labeled with student name, medication and dosage. The school nurse will administer medication.

If you will be sending **over-the-counter** medication or applications (i.e. Tylenol, Benadryl, lip balm, sunscreen, antibiotic ointment, etc) for your child to have as needed during the

school day, a separate form will need to be completed. Forms are available in the school office.

Head Lice

Head lice is a common occurrence in young children. Lice is not related to cleanliness. Head lice are most commonly transmitted through close head-to-head contact, but can occasionally be transmitted on furniture or by sharing hats, hair brushes, headbands, etc. If live lice are found on a student:

- Families will be notified and the student must be picked up from school.
- The child's head must be treated with a product formulated to kill lice.
- All nits must be removed using a special comb which is usually included with the lice treatment product.
- When the child returns to school, hair and scalp will be examined by school staff.

School staff, with the support of families, will do everything possible to prevent head lice from spreading to others.

If you have any questions or concerns about illness or health concerns call the school office.

Drills: Lockdowns, Evacuation and other Emergencies

Students and staff will be participating in drills of emergency procedures. Procedures are to ensure student and staff safety. In case of a real emergency situation, families will be notified by school officials with details of the emergency through local media.

Recess

An increasing body of research continues to indicate the benefits of unstructured play and specifically outdoor play for young children. The term **recess** refers to a break during the day set aside to allow children the time for active, gross motor, free play. Recess is an essential component of education and young children must have the opportunity to participate in regular periods of active, free play with peers. * Unified Recess Plan available upon request



Discipline Procedures

In order to maintain a happy and safe school environment, students are taught the importance of good choices, consideration and respect for others. Our main focus is to teach the children appropriate social skills and is preventative in nature. We aim to build

the student's self-esteem and self-discipline so they have the skills to solve problems, in and out of the classroom.

Constructive methods are used to maintain group and individual behavior. Some examples may include but are not limited to:

- Conscious Discipline Strategies (ie; Feeling Buddies/calming strategies)
- Character Strong (character traits)
- SMART Kids (following directions/problem solving)
- Thinking Chair/Break Time
- Think Sheets

*Individual plans may need to be discussed and developed based on the student's needs.

We have identified 3 Universal Expectations:

- **BE SAFE**
- **BE KIND**
- **BE READY**

Your child will be recognized for these positive “BEE”haviors!

Be on the lookout for a bee hand stamp or sticker and ask them about their day!

Special Activities



Birthday Celebrations

Birthdays are a special occasion. Please make arrangements with your child's teacher for any special plans. If you choose to send treats, please inquire about student allergies. Please do not send party invitations to school. To protect student privacy, teachers cannot distribute class lists for party invitations. We encourage families to come enjoy a special activity with your child at school!



Families Matter Meetings:

Teacher and parents working together as a team with a common focus and expectation. Parent/teacher collaboration maximizes student learning in and outside of school. Meetings to share progress are held Fall and Winter.

We are smarter and stronger together than we are as individuals!

Young Athletes



The Young Athletes Program was established by Special Olympics International to provide early developmental opportunities for young children, utilizing guided motor activities. The weekly motor “gym time” activities presented in the program is designed to advance development of young children with intellectual disability who typically lag their peers without intellectual disability. All children in our program participate. We pride ourselves in being a Unified Champion School!



Bookmobile

The Great Falls Public Library Bookmobile will come to the ELF Center every two weeks for approximately 1 hour per stop. The teachers can apply for a library card to check books out for themselves or students. There is never a fine charged for bookmobile checkouts. The students can get cards also, but then those books become the responsibility of the parent. The bookmobile driver will have preschool age books for the ELF stop. Teachers will make families aware of specific dates and times.

If you have any questions or concerns or would like more detailed information regarding any of the above information, please contact your child’s teacher or the following:

Linda Lawson Administrative Assistant @ 268-6400.

Barbara Doughty-Early Childhood Education Coordinator @ 268-6438

Jackie Mainwaring-Executive Director of Student Achievement @ 268-6006

