



**Early Childhood
Handbook
2026-2027**

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND PHILOSOPHY

Los Lunas Schools (LLS) is dedicated to nurturing the holistic development of every child through developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive practices that honor individual growth and learning styles. We believe in the power of play-based learning and a fundamental approach to engage young minds, fostering curiosity and creativity while developing critical social, emotional, and cognitive skills. We ensure that all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have equitable access to learning opportunities. Together with our families, we strive to cultivate a joyful, inclusive, and enriching environment where every child can explore, learn, and grow.

Our Early Childhood Programs offer five services: (1) no cost therapy appointments for students with speech-only delays (to treat an articulation disorder or stuttering), (2) no cost preschool services for students who qualify for special education by demonstrating significant developmental delays, (3) no-cost preschool services for peer models in the special education preschool program, (4) a no cost New Mexico PreK preschool program for children turning 4 before September 1st of the current school year, and (5) a no cost New Mexico PreK preschool program for children turning 3 before September 1st of the current school year.

The comprehensive preschool curriculum used in all our Early Childhood Programs is called *CIRCLE PreK Curriculum* by The Children's Learning Institute. This curriculum aligns with the New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines and has comprehensive coverage of cognitive and social and emotional development and balances direct instruction, guided play, and child-initiated activities. There is a family engagement component to foster these partnerships that includes weekly family activities that support skills addressed in the classroom that week. Families have free access to the family activity collection that includes hundreds of activities. Children in our Early Childhood Programs learn primarily through play in a variety of learning centers (blocks, dramatic play, science, etc). Classroom practices that occur daily include developmentally appropriate large and small group literacy, math, and science activities, alphabet knowledge activities, read-alouds with focus on comprehension, writing opportunities, oral language development, social problem-solving skill development, and gross motor development through outdoor play.

All elementary schools utilize the ParentSquare app to send information to their families about their preschool programs and the registration process as registration approaches each spring. Registration information is also on our website. For more information, visit the Los Lunas Schools' Early Childhood Education website: <https://www.llschools.net/departments/special-services/early-childhood-education>.

CHILD FIND

Los Lunas School's Child Find offers screenings and evaluations for preschool aged children who are suspected of having a delay. Any parent or guardian who has concerns about the development of their child is encouraged to call (505) 866-2440 to make an appointment for a screening. Screenings occur every Wednesday during the school year. If a child fails any portion of the screening, our Child Find Team will schedule a more comprehensive assessment in that area. Prior to completing a formal evaluation, the following is necessary: original birth certificate, immunization records, proof of residency (must live within the Los Lunas Schools boundaries), the parent/guardian's driver's license, and guardianship paperwork if applicable. Legal guardians must be present to sign consent for developmental screenings and formal evaluations. For more information visit our website:

<https://www.llschools.net/departments/special-services/child-find>

THERAPY-ONLY APPOINTMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPEECH-ONLY DELAYS

Students who are eligible to receive speech therapy services because of a significant delay in articulation or stuttering as their only disability area and are not old enough to attend the 4-year-old NM Preschool program can attend "therapy-only" appointments (typically 30-60 minutes per week depending on the child's needs). These appointments will be held at the child's neighborhood school. Parents must transport their children to and from the appointment, but can be reimbursed for mileage.

Students who qualify for speech-only services are not eligible to attend our special education preschool classes but are eligible for our New Mexico PreK as long as they meet the age requirements (see NM PreK Program, pg. 3). There is no cost for speech-only services and all students who qualify will receive therapy only services.

Therapy-only students follow the preschool calendar and are subject to the same policies that other preschool students must follow (see pages 8-10). The following additional attendance policy applies:

ATTENDANCE: Students are expected to attend their appointments consistently and parents are asked to call the school if their child will be absent. Absence due to illness or injury will be considered excused, but may require a doctor's verification, if excessive. If your child has 4 consecutive unexcused absences, he/she will be dropped from the program and will have to re-register at the school site in order to resume the speech therapy appointments. Attempts will be made to notify parents prior to dropping a student from services, and services can resume at any time during the school year.

TRANSITION: If the child turns 4 before September 1st of the following school year, then they will be eligible to attend a New Mexico PreK program for that school year. Registration procedures can be found on page 7.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION (ECSP) PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Students with significant developmental delays that meet eligibility requirements for special education may attend an ECSP preschool program. These programs provide services to children between the ages of 3 and 5 and are located at, Los Lunas Elementary and Peralta Elementary. See the chart below to see which school your student would attend. The preschool program consists of either morning or afternoon sessions. Please, check with your preschool site for exact program times as they vary. Our goal is to prepare students for school and reduce the need for special education services once they begin kindergarten through direct instruction and opportunities for structured play and learning.

IF MY CHILD'S NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL IS:	HE/SHE WILL ATTEND:
Sundance, Katherine Gallegos, Raymond Gabaldon, Los Lunas Elementary Schools	Los Lunas Elementary School - (505) 865-9313
Ann Parish, Peralta, Valencia, or Bosque Farms, Desert View, or Tome Elementary Schools	Peralta Elementary School - (505) 869-2679

Our program provides a safe and nurturing environment to facilitate children's development in six major areas: cognitive, communication, self-help, motor skills, social and play skills, and emotional development. Curriculum objectives are met in a literacy-rich and math-rich environment, and learning in the areas of science and technology, the arts, social studies, and social emotional learning is also a focus.

The child's program is planned carefully by the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) Team, which includes the family, Inclusion Support Coach, classroom teacher, and any treating therapist(s). There is no charge to attend the program if the student meets eligibility requirements and curb to curb transportation is provided. All students who qualify will receive special education services they qualify for.

TRANSITION: As a child reaches the age for kindergarten (turns 5 before September 1st of the following year) a transition IEP will be held before the student will attend kindergarten to aid in the transition process for families. If the child will be going back to their neighborhood school, the inclusion support coach from that school will be invited to the meeting to answer any questions families may have. Families will go and register at their neighborhood school at the end of April to meet the kindergarten teachers and get more information.

PEER MODEL PROGRAM

The peer model preschool program is designed to meet the needs of preschool-age children whose families are seeking a readiness program for their child prior to entering kindergarten. These children will be models for children with developmental delays in the ECSP classroom.

There is not a fee for students to attend this program, but space is limited and parents must provide transportation.

Children who are developing as expected for their age serve as peer models for those students in our program who have delays in one or more areas of development. Children participating in the Peer Model Preschool Program must be at least 3 years old and not of kindergarten age by September 1st of the current school year.

PEER MODEL AGREEMENT: All peer models are subject to the policies/procedures that apply to all preschool-age students (see pages 8-9). In addition, the following policies/procedures are specific to peer models:

APPLICATION PROCESS: Parents will need to complete a peer model application. Immunization records, the child's birth certificate, and proof of residency must be presented when your child's model application is turned in. Applications will NOT be accepted without these items.

After this application is completed and returned, parents will be contacted to set up a developmental screening by the classroom teacher. In order to be a peer model, the child must pass this developmental screening completed by the preschool teacher. If your child has passed a screening by the Los Lunas Schools Child Find Team in the last 3 months, you may provide the results to the school with the application.

Once parents are notified that their child has been accepted into the program, parents must register on-line. When that process is complete, they will officially be enrolled in the program.

TRIAL PERIOD: If accepted in the program, peer models will be given a two-week trial period. We reserve the right to exit your child after this two-week period, or at any time in the future, if they can no longer meet the requirements of a peer role model.

TRANSPORTATION: Parents of peers must provide transportation to and from school. Parents must also be committed to having their child arrive and leave school on time. Failure to do so could result in exit from the program.

WITHDRAWAL: Peer models who leave the preschool program for any reason and later wish to return may be placed on a waiting list until an opening is available.

NEW MEXICO PREK PROGRAM

NM PreK is a state funded, developmentally appropriate school readiness program for children who turn either 3 or 4 by September 1st of the current school year. A child that is not yet three by the start of school will have to wait until their third birthday to participate.

The NM PreK Program includes children with special needs and IEP goals are integrated into daily instruction. Staff are trained in inclusion practices and are supported by the special education teachers, Inclusion Support Coach, and other treating therapists at each school site. Lesson plans are individualized to address each child's developmental progress and IEP goals.

There is limited enrollment for NM PreK. Children living within the school's boundary, those in foster care, and those who are experiencing homelessness receive priority for attendance in the program, followed by children of school staff. Finally, those outside the school's boundary are considered for placement, if space is available. Parents need take their proof of residency, immunization records, and birth certificate to the school site to start the registration process. Once the documentation is in order, then the student will register on-line. When that process is complete, they will officially be enrolled in the program. Once a program is full, children will be placed on a waiting list. LLS works closely with the community-based NM PreK providers to ensure that every child has the opportunity to attend a NM PreK program.

Curb to curb transportation is provided by the Los Lunas Schools, if you are attending the NM PreK school in your home site area only. A home visit, attendance at parent meetings, and a developmental screening of your child is required for participation in the program.

DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENINGS: A developmental screening will be conducted within the first 90 days of your child's attendance in the NM PreK Program. Results of this screening will be sent home with the child once it is completed. If your child fails any portion of the screening, you are asked to contact Child Find at 505-866-2440 to schedule an appointment for further screening.

WELLNESS SCREENINGS: A wellness screening will be conducted within the first 90 days of your child's attendance in the NM PreK program. If your child fails any of these screenings, parents will be notified.

NM PreK Sites

Extended Day Programs for 4 year olds: Katherine Gallegos Elementary (505) 865-6223, Los Lunas Elementary (505) 865-9313, Peralta Elementary (505) 869-2679, Raymond Gabaldon Elementary (505) 866-0456, Sundance Elementary (505) 866-0185

Extended Day Program for 3 year olds: Los Lunas Elementary (505) 865-9313

ALL EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM POLICIES

The following policies apply to ALL preschool-age students, regardless of which program they attend:

SNACKS: The classroom teacher may request snacks to be provided, but it is not required, in order for the child to participate.

MEALS: All meals served meet the USDA requirements. Breakfast is served for AM sessions and lunch is served for PM sessions. Full day programs receive both breakfast and lunch. Parents must obtain documentation from their doctor of any food allergies and provide this documentation to the school nurse before the first day of attendance.

BEHAVIOR: Positive behavior support strategies and social-emotional learning approaches are used in every early childhood program across the district. All staff is trained in the Pyramid Model and implement consistent, attuned, safe, and responsive interactions. For example, staff will help children to label their emotions and to resolve disagreements in a peaceful way, actively listen to children, and interact with the children at their eye level. Corporal punishment, shaming and expulsion will not be used or tolerated.

TOILET LEARNING: Children cannot be denied enrollment based on their toilet independence. LLS supports the toilet learning process by fostering independence and confidence while ensuring a positive and respectful environment. It is approached as a natural part of child development and educators will observe and support individual readiness signs. Children will be encouraged through positive reinforcement and praise and educators will use a supportive and patient approach to toilet learning. Families will be informed about their child's process and will be provided resources and tips to support consistency between home and school as needed. Parents are encouraged to provide insight to what is and is not working in the home in regards to toilet learning to make it a collaborative process.

WITHDRAWAL: Parents may withdraw their child (ren) from the preschool program at any time but are encouraged to give staff at least a week's notice in advance of removing the child from the program. Parents are asked, but not required to leave a forwarding address or school contact if the child will be entering another preschool program.

ABSENCES: Students are expected to attend school consistently (at least 85% of the time). Parents are asked to call the school if their child will be absent and to send a written notification within 24 hours following each absence. Absences due to illness, injury, doctor's appointment, death in the family, religious commitment, diagnostic commitment, and extenuating circumstances (as agreed to by the administration prior to the absence) will be considered excused. If your child has 10 consecutive unexcused absences, he/she will be dropped from the program. Every attempt will be made to contact the parents before such action is taken, including but not limited to calls home, sending ParentView messages, and sending a School Resource Officer to the home to do a wellness check. Services can resume at any time during the school year for speech-only and Early Childhood Special Education programs. Children who have left the Peer Model or NM PreK preschool programs and later wish to return may need to be placed on a waiting list until openings are available.

EXPULSION POLICY: Research suggests that school expulsion and suspension practices are associated with negative educational and life outcomes. If an alternative placement is being considered due to a child's behavior, Los Lunas Schools will ensure that required Early Childhood Education & Care Department support interventions have been implemented. These include family input, modifications to the environment or teaching practices, interventions, support from a school counselor or social worker, referral to Child Find, and conducting a functional behavior plan and behavior intervention plan if necessary.

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS: All students must have their immunization status (i.e., current shots) verified in accordance with New Mexico state law. Parents must also present their child's birth certificate and proof of residency when registering. Please, contact your school site if you have questions about what qualifies as proof of residency.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Information regarding students' delays and/or disabilities is confidential and will not be shared with classmates or their families.

EARLY RELEASE/HOLIDAYS/CANCELLATIONS/DELAYS: The preschool calendar closely follows the general Los Lunas Schools' calendar. You will be given a copy of the preschool calendar upon your child's enrollment in the program. Follow this calendar for your preschool child only. All preschool students will not attend school on the district's professional development days.

In the event that there is a delay of school due to weather or other unforeseen circumstance, BOTH morning and afternoon ECSP preschool classes will be cancelled for half-day programs only. Full-day programs will follow the district's delay schedule. All therapy-only sessions are cancelled on delay days.

ILLNESSES: We ask that you not bring your child to school if he/she is sick. Symptoms to watch for include:

- A temperature of 100 degrees or above within the past 24 hours
- Vomiting within the past 24 hours
- Excessive nasal discharge, diarrhea, or coughing

TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN: Each elementary school site ensures that the preschool students have a seamless transition to kindergarten. Each site holds site specific events to introduce families to kindergarten staff. There is a district-wide kindergarten registration night in the spring semester so that families can come to the school and get information about kindergarten and to register their child. Before school starts each year, kindergarten staff host meet and greets in their classrooms so that children and families can meet the teacher, bring their supplies, and see their classrooms.

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE: LLS is committed to supporting home language development alongside English acquisition. All communication materials are available in the families' home language and a translator is provided as necessary for meetings, parent-teacher conferences,

and PreK events. Staff is trained in the required Early Childhood Education & Care Department trainings related to second language acquisition. Lesson plans are individualized to address each child's developmental progress. Staff validate and affirm each student's home language all while connecting with families home culture and language and bridging the home school cultures and increasing child and family engagement.

MCKINNEY-VENTO: Preschool children are covered by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act. It is a federal law that governs the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Assistance available through Los Lunas Schools could include items such as school clothing, socks, shoes, undergarments, school supplies/backpacks, and hygiene kits. If you are unsure of whether or not you child qualifies, call the Special Services Department at 505-866-2440.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION (FAQ)

1. **Can my child, who is a peer model, attend both the morning and afternoon session?** No. At this time, we are limiting participation to $\frac{1}{2}$ days, to provide the opportunity for a broad spectrum of the young children of Los Lunas to have access to a high-quality, low-cost, researched-based preschool program.
2. **Can my child who receives therapy-only services be a peer model?** No. All peer models need to be typically developing with no delays.
3. **Can my child who receives therapy-only services participate in the New Mexico PreK program, if they are four years old by September 1st of the school year?** Yes, at their neighborhood school.



Early Childhood Handbook Acknowledgement

Student's Name: _____

Student's Preschool Site: _____

As the parent of the above PreK student, I acknowledge receipt of the Los Lunas Schools Early Childhood PreK Handbook.

A developmental screening of your child is a requirement for attendance in the NM Pre-K Program. This screening includes a developmental, vision, hearing, health, and dental screening. Please select one of the statements below.

_____ I **do** give my permission to my child's teacher to complete a PreK screening

_____ I **do not** give my permission to my child's teacher to complete a PreK screening.
Your child may not participate in the NM PreK Program.

_____ My child does not attend a NM PreK Program (they are either enrolled in the ECSP or are receiving therapy only services).

Parent Signature _____

Date: _____