

PARENT HANDBOOK



Discovery Learning Preschool

Family Education

2026-2027

Our mission is to **Educate**, **Inspire** & **Empower** our diverse learners, to shape their futures, to accomplish their dreams and to contribute positively to our local and global communities.



WELCOME TO ISD 728 EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION & DISCOVERY LEARNING PRESCHOOL

CONTENTS

- 3 Early Childhood Family Education Overview
- 4 ECFE Classroom Information
- 5 ECFE Program Information
- 6-7 Discovery Learning Preschool Program Information
- 8 Parent Involvement
- 9 Health Information
- 10 Safety at School
- 11 Additional Services

LOCATIONS:

Handke Center
1170 Main St
Elk River, MN

Otsego Elem
8125 River Road NE
Otsego, MN

Prairie View Elem
12220 80th St NE
Otsego, MN

Rogers Elem
12521 Main St
Rogers, MN

Zimmerman Elem
25959 4th St W
Zimmerman, MN

CONTACT INFORMATION:

The Discovery Learning Preschool/Early Childhood Family Education office is located within Handke Center in Elk River.

Office: 763-241-3524 Fax: 763-241-3521 Email: ECFE@isd728.org

EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION?

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth and kindergarten enrollment. It recognizes that families provide children's first and most important learning environments and parents are children's first and most significant teachers. The purpose of the early childhood family education program is to provide parenting education to support children's learning and development.

OVER ALL GOALS OF DISTRICT 728 EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION

The goals of Early Childhood Family Education are:

Support Whole Child Development

We nurture each child's physical, intellectual, social, and emotional growth during the critical early years, laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning and well-being.

Empower and Engage Parents

We inspire and equip parents to be confident, informed, and active participants in their child's development, learning, and education.

Foster Strong Family Relationships

We promote healthy communication and positive connections between parents and children, while helping families build supportive relationships with one another.

Ensure Inclusive Access and Community Connection

We strive to reach and reflect the diversity of our community, offering inclusive, accessible programming and connecting families with valuable resources to eliminate barriers and strengthen family well-being.

WHY INVOLVE PARENTS?

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

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION

Play is essential to early childhood development—it's how young children make sense of their world. Through play, children develop critical thinking skills, practice language, strengthen relationships, and grow emotionally. In ECFE, we embrace the power of play as a natural and effective way for children to learn. Our environments are intentionally designed to encourage exploration, creativity, and meaningful interaction. Guided by the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs), our play-based experiences support the whole child—honoring each child's individual development while fostering a lifelong love of learning.

ECFE CLASSROOM INFORMATION

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

In ECFE, we are preparing the learning environment for your child. Please come to class ready to learn with them. We ask that you refrain from cell phone use in the presence of your child whether in the classroom or the hallway. Please do not bring toys and/or valuable items from home to ECFE classes. In accordance with school district policy, objects or toys resembling weapons of any kind are not permitted on school property; such items will not be allowed. We'll ask you to take your child to the bathroom to change his/her diaper. A changing table is located in the bathroom. Please bring diapers from home.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN AN ECFE CLASS

Circle Time

Circle time is a fun and important part of our class routine. Children may participate in different ways depending on their comfort level. Some may jump right in, while others take time to warm up. That's okay!

- Sit with your child or have them on your lap to help them feel comfortable.
- Choose a spot near the back if you're unsure whether your child will stay.
- Encourage participation without forcing it—many children join in over time.
- It's normal for some children to wander; staff will gently guide them back and keep them safe.
- Practicing songs and fingerplays at home can help build confidence.

Parent-Child Together Time

This is a time to connect and learn through play—a child's most natural way of growing.

- Supervise your child and stay close during play.
- Follow their lead. Let curiosity guide your time together.
- Engage fully with eye contact, gentle touch, and conversation.
- Model turn-taking and offer other choices if a toy is in use.
- Be present. Please avoid using your phone during this time.
- Some play is Messy. Please dress your child accordingly.

Play builds confidence, relationships, and lifelong learning—thank you for being part of it!

Separation & Parent Discussion Time

Separation can be hard for some children, and we're here to support you both.

- Let your child know ahead of time that you'll be in another room and will return.
- Comfort items from home are welcome if they help ease the transition.
- Teachers and parents will work together on a plan that supports a smooth separation.
- Babies are welcome in the parent room until three months of age; after that, they must attend sibling care.

In the parent discussion room, we value open, respectful conversation:

- Sharing is encouraged, but always optional.
- All conversations are confidential.
- We can have different opinions and still respect each other.

"It is a wonderful time that we have together as well as all of the support from other teachers and parents."

- ECFE Parent Participant

ECFE PROGRAM INFORMATION

LACTATION ROOM

Lactation rooms are available at Handke for mothers who would prefer privacy for nursing and pumping. If you are comfortable nursing in the classroom, you are welcome to do so. Please ask staff if you need assistance.

SAFETY

The safety of your child outside of the classroom is your responsibility. Supervise them at all times. Due to the volume of traffic on the streets and in the parking lots, supervising your child is imperative. Hold their hand when crossing streets/parking lots. If you need assistance at arrival or departure time, please ask a staff member.

PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Our ECFE/SR Advisory Council consists of a group of parents who want to be involved in our ECFE/ SR programs. Their purpose is to represent parent participant concerns and to assist staff with program planning. They sponsor annual activities and fundraisers. Visit <https://ce.isd728.org/early-learners/advisory-council> to learn more!

PROGRAM PARTICIPANT CHILDCARE

Program Participant Childcare is on-site childcare for the children of participants enrolled in Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classes at the Handke Center. Program Participant Childcare takes place during class time and parents **MUST REMAIN** on-site throughout care. This childcare is supervised by staff specifically trained in Early Childhood and School Age best practices. Fees: \$3 per session (day) per child.

How do I register?

- Online at ce.isd728.org/PPC
- Your childcare account will be invoiced by 5pm on Thursday the week prior to scheduled attendance with auto payments processed on Friday of the week prior to attendance.
- Schedules and payments are online only: email and phone registrations will not be accepted.
- Scheduled days can be completed weekly or monthly; you will be invoiced weekly.
- Please note: Site staff cannot accept registrations, changes or cancellations.

ECFE Playdough Recipe

Put the following in a pan:

- 2 Cups water
- 3 Tbsp vegetable oil (this is the only oil that will work)
- Add food coloring if desired
- Carefully heat to a boil (it will spatter).

In a large bowl, add the ingredients above with:

- 2 1/2 Cups white all-purpose flour (this is the only flour that will work)
- 1/2 Cup salt
- 1 Tbsp alum (found in the seasoning/spice aisle at the grocery store)

Either put dough on a lightly floured surface and knead well by hand until a dough forms or keep in a bowl and mix with a Kitchenaid dough blade. Place the well-kneaded playdough into a plastic bag. When cool, wipe condensation from the bag with a paper towel. (Playdough usually lasts for 2-3 weeks. Keeping it cold in the refrigerator can help it stay fresh longer, too).

DISCOVERY LEARNING PRESCHOOL

PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Discovery Learning Preschool is a highly recognized and sought after 4-star Parent Aware Rated School Readiness program conveniently offered in Elk River, Otsego, Rogers and Zimmerman. We offer a customized preschool experience for your child in a safe and fun environment staffed by professionally trained, caring preschool teachers. Enrollment for the current preschool year closes at the conclusion of Spring Break. Families interested in enrolling after that time should contact the Early Childhood office to discuss available options and enrollment for the upcoming school year.

PLAY IN PRESCHOOL

Play is a vital part of early childhood development, serving as the foundation for learning, social interaction, and emotional growth. Through play, children explore their world, build problem-solving skills, develop language, and learn to collaborate with others in meaningful ways. Our program recognizes the importance of this and is committed to creating rich, engaging play-based experiences grounded in research-based curricula. By using trusted frameworks such as Creative Curriculum and aligning with Teaching Strategies GOLD objectives, we ensure that every activity—whether in dramatic play, block building, art, or outdoor exploration—is intentionally planned to support whole-child development while honoring the natural ways children learn best: through play.

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM EMBEDDED IN EACH CLASS:

- Creative Curriculum
- Teaching Strategies GOLD
- EZ-Write Handwriting curriculum
- High Five (Pyramid Model/Classroom Engagement Model)
- The Catalyst Approach

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Your child's teachers will share drop-off/pick-up procedures specific for your class and will meet/dismiss students at the start/end of classes.

All preschool students must be dropped off and picked up using a hand-to-hand transfer process. Parents and caregivers are expected to walk their child to the door and connect directly with the teacher at both arrival and dismissal. Students who ride a bus or van will be transferred by school district or transportation staff using the same hand-to-hand procedure. Only individuals listed as approved contacts in Campus may pick up a child from preschool. For safety reasons, we do not permit anyone under the age of 16 to pick up or walk a child home.

Parents are expected to pick up their child within five minutes of the end of the class. A late fee of \$1 per minute, per student will apply after the five-minute grace period. This fee will be billed to your account. Chronic late pick-ups or extreme lateness can result in other penalties, including exclusion from the program.

Cubbies/lockers are provided for coats and backpacks. They are located in the classroom or in a hallway near your classroom. Please do not bring toys and/or valuable items from home to Discovery Learning Preschool classes. In accordance with school district policy, objects or toys resembling weapons of any kind are not permitted on school property; such items will not be allowed.

SEPARATION

Parent/child separations can be difficult, and it's okay if your child cries. This is a normal part of adjusting, and we will care for them with kindness and reassurance. Help prepare your child by letting them know ahead of time when they will be going to school. Tell them what you'll be doing while they're at school and what fun activities they'll get to do after school. Remind them who will be picking them up (or meeting them at the bus).

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to your child's teacher—we're here to support both you and your child.

CLOTHING

Children should wear comfortable play clothes and shoes. Some activities may be messy, please dress your child accordingly. We also ask that you keep a change of clothing in your child's backpack in case of accidents or spills. Please label all personal items.

OUTDOOR PLAY AND WINTER WEATHER

Gross motor play is an important part of child development. We go outside for gross motor play when the temperature and/or wind chill is 0°F or above, following district weather guidelines. During the winter months, please send your child with appropriate outdoor gear each day, including boots, snow pants, a winter jacket, a hat, and mittens or gloves. Please label all personal items.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

There will be district staff, including the ECFE/SR Manager and Assistant ECFE/SR Manager, who may attend or observe classes. We utilize multiple coaching experiences in our classrooms. We also provide opportunities for student teachers to work in the classes.

SEESAW

Family Communication is a key component in the Discovery Learning Program. All teachers utilize Seesaw as a means to communicate with families regularly. Please be sure your Seesaw account is set up and notifications are enabled so you can receive important updates, announcements, reminders, and classroom information throughout the school year.

PHOTO RELEASE

Teachers regularly use photos in their communication to families. Additionally, on occasion, photos will be used for marketing purposes. If you choose to opt out of photos, please email ecfe@isd728.org.

SNACKS & MEALS

Individual snacks will be provided during the Discovery Learning class sessions. All full day and afternoon preschool classes receive lunch, provided by the district. For information on food allergies, please see the Health Information below. To learn more about food service or dietary accommodations, [CLICK HERE](#)

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND CLASS

If you are unable to attend class due to illness or other family obligations, please contact your child's teacher directly. All Early Childhood attendance is handled through our Handke Center Office. If you have any attendance questions, please call our office at 763-241-3524.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS

Consult our website, local television stations or Facebook for the latest information if inclement weather arises. Please do not put you or your child at risk if you feel that weather is an issue. If inclement weather forces the District 728 schools to close, or dismiss early, one of the following announcements will be made:

- Two Hour Late Start means morning Community Education and ECFE/SR classes will be cancelled. Afternoon and evening classes will meet as scheduled.
- No School means morning, afternoon and evening Community Education and ECFE/SR classes will be cancelled.
- Emergency Early Dismissal means all Community Education and ECFE/SR classes for the balance of the day (afternoon and evening) are cancelled.
- E-learning: Your child's teacher will be sending home choice boards for any e-learning days that may arise. More information will be shared by your child's teacher.

CELEBRATIONS

Birthdays

Children's birthdays will be recognized in class with simple celebrations, such as a song or special note, unless a parent requests otherwise. Birthday treats or food items are not allowed. Non-food items (e.g., pencils, stickers) may be sent home with classmates.

Holiday Celebrations

Holidays are not celebrated during Discovery Learning Preschool. ISD 728 Community Education has a variety of holiday/ cultural offerings throughout the year for all ages, visit www.728communityed.com for more information.

PRESCHOOL PARENT INVOLVEMENT

PARENT PARTICIPATION

Your involvement plays a vital role in your child's success. In Discovery Learning, certain Three-Year-Old classes include bi-weekly parent-child Family Days—these shared experiences are a meaningful part of your child's learning. All Discovery Learning Preschool classes will also have Family Days scheduled periodically throughout the year.

CONFERENCES

Family conferences are scheduled twice per year (October and February). These conferences are an opportunity for program staff to share a child's progress in school and partner with families in setting goals. Additional conferences may be scheduled by parent request.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION

Children in ISD 728 can receive educational services from the Early Childhood Special Education program in the district. Home-based instruction, classroom instruction and parent education are offered. For more information on how to arrange a developmental evaluation for your child or for any other questions you may have, call 241-3400 ext. 5546.

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- Schedules and payments are online only: email and phone registrations will not be accepted.
- Scheduled days can be completed weekly or monthly; you will be invoiced weekly.
- Please note: Site staff cannot accept registrations, changes or cancellations.

If you're interested in volunteering in the classroom, a background check is required. Please reach out to your child's teacher for more information.

HEALTH INFORMATION



ALLERGIES AND HEALTH CONCERNS

At the time of registration parents will be asked to complete a form indicating any allergy, health, or special needs of their child or children participating in class. Parents may be asked to provide additional information regarding their child, and/or a treatment plan with the school nurse. Information is required to comply with school district requirements and to insure the well being of your child while at school. Information collected is confidential and will only be shared with staff directly involved in your child's class. To learn more about dietary accommodations, [CLICK HERE](#).

ABOUT IMMUNIZATIONS

Per Minnesota law, up-to-date immunizations or medical exemption or a notarized objection letter must be submitted to the Discovery Learning Preschool office and kept in the minor child's record.

IS MY CHILD WELL ENOUGH TO GO TO CLASS?

Many parents are frequently concerned about when their child should stay home or attend class. Remember that a child with an infectious disease can spread the disease when in contact with others in the family and the community. We follow ISD 728 guidelines for common illness and school attendance. [CLICK HERE](#)

IF YOUR CHILD IS SICK

- If your child is absent due to illness, please call your child's teacher.
- If your child becomes sick at preschool, we will bring them to a quiet, supervised space and contact you right away. We ask that you pick them up promptly to help prevent the spread of illness.



SAFETY AT SCHOOL

PARKING LOT & TRANSPORTATION

The safety of your child outside of the classroom is your responsibility. Supervise them at all times. Due to the volume of traffic on the streets and in the parking lots, supervising your child is imperative. Hold their hand when crossing streets/parking lots. If you need assistance at arrival or departure time, please ask a staff member.



SECURITY

Handke Center, Elk River

Enter the school through the main doors to the building (Door 5). You will need to check in at the office and receive a visitor sticker. Other entrance doors to the school will be locked to provide additional security.

Otsego Elementary

Enter the school through Door 7, near the preschool bus drop off. A staff member will escort students and/or families to the classroom. Arrivals outside of regular class hours will need to check in through the main office.

Prairie View Elementary, Rogers Elementary and Zimmerman Elementary Schools

Enter the school through the main doors to the Early Childhood Center. You will need to buzz for entrance at the door panel. Other entrance doors to the school will be locked to provide additional security. If you need access to any other part of the building outside of the early childhood center, you must check in through the school's main office.

PARKING

For the safety of all, parking is strictly prohibited in front of buildings, along yellow curbs, or in fire lanes—violators may be ticketed. Please do not park in designated handicap spaces unless you have proper identification. We also ask that you respect nearby residents' driveways and local businesses when choosing where to park. As a safety reminder, never leave babies or children unattended in parked vehicles.

DATA PRIVACY AND RELEASE INFORMATION

During registration, you will be asked to provide information about your child. This information is used to: enroll participants in our programs, support planning and goal setting, report on your child's progress, and manage billing. The data is shared only with instructors, staff members who require it for their roles, and those who may need to contact families. It may also be shared with the school district's census office. Any release of information to outside individuals or agencies will only occur with a signed Consent to Release Information form. If you prefer that your child's photo not be used in Seesaw communications or marketing materials, please email us at ecfe@isd728.org.

MANDATED REPORTING

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

LOCKDOWN/TORNADO/FIRE DRILLS

Each school in the district is required, by law, to conduct practice drills each year to determine how a crisis situation might be handled if one should occur at our school. Drills are a necessary part of preparing for possible emergencies. In the event of a drill, please be patient if you are on school grounds. *Please note: if you are in the school during a drill, we ask that you do not take your child away from the class as we need to make sure all children are safe and accounted for.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES

EARLY CHILDHOOD SCREENING

Because of the importance of a child's early years to their later development, Early Childhood Screening is required before children attend Discovery Learning Classes and kindergarten. Through the screening process parents can discuss their concerns and find out about resources in the school and community and problems can be identified early. Children are eligible to be screened at age 3. Families will be contacted by mail and email about scheduling appointments for Early Childhood Screening. Call the office at (763) 241-3525 with questions. [CLICK HERE](#) to register.

EDVENTURE CLUB-DISCOVERY LEARNING CHILDCARE

Community Education is offering child care services to extend your child's experience with their Discovery Learning Preschool class. Childcare is available for eligible classes before and after your child's preschool class to help accommodate your needs. If you have additional questions about Edventure Club-Discovery Learning please contact EdVenture Club at 763-241-3544.

TRANSPORTATION

If your home address is within the ISD 728 boundaries, you can choose transportation for your child to preschool classes for an additional fee. Transportation is provided by Vision Transportation, the vendor for all district busing. Your child will be picked up by a bus or van with enough time for them to arrive for the start of class; you are responsible for handing your child over to the bus driver. Upon arrival at preschool, your child will be escorted off the bus by our preschool staff and brought to his/her classroom. Upon completion of class, your child will be escorted to the bus by the preschool staff and transferred onto the bus; families are responsible for meeting the bus at drop-off. Transportation requests are processed by the Early Childhood office at Handke; please contact the ECCE office for information, to request, or to make changes with transportation services.

Thank you for choosing ISD 728 Early Childhood Programs for your child. We are looking forward to a great school year!

SCHOOL READINESS (ECFE/SR) OFFICE

1170 Main Street | Elk River, MN 55330
763.241.3524 | ecfe@isd728.org

STAY CONNECTED



728ECFE



728_ECFE



For more information or to register, visit the ECFE/SR website at www.isd728.org/ECFE or Call 763.241.3524.