



# Preschool Parent Handbook

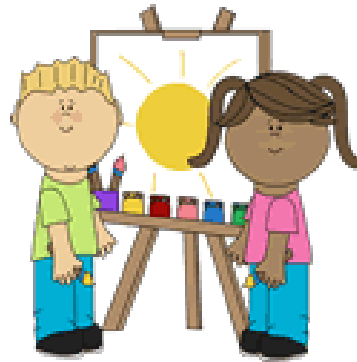
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Dedicated to Excellence

# Preschool Parent Handbook

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## **PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY**

Our goal as early childhood educators is to provide a strong foundation that will help all children become lifelong learners. We believe that children learn through experience and discovery. Our goal is to prepare children to enter kindergarten with a healthy self-concept and a positive attitude toward school and learning. We accomplish this by offering developmentally appropriate curriculum designed to develop social, emotional, physical and cognitive abilities. We understand that every child is unique, so we organize our preschool program to allow children to initiate activities to grow from personal interest and intentions. Our preschool students learn through exploration with hands-on developmentally appropriate activities and materials. We facilitate active learning by providing resources, and planning experiences in an environment in which all children can learn.

# PRESCHOOL PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## A. Early Learning Standards

The curriculum is aligned to the Arizona Early Learning Standards, which have been developed for children 3-5 years of age. The standards help us to provide quality learning experiences and cover a wide range of skill development. Since every child is a unique individual and learns at his/her own readiness level, the standards allow each child to progress through each developmental skill as they become ready. The standards support each child to learn through positive relationships with teachers and peers and to learn through child-initiated, child-directed and teacher supported play. The standards are categorized into 8 different skill areas.

1) **Social-Emotional-** Children learn and thrive when they feel emotionally secure and physically safe. Early in life children demonstrate feelings of competence and take pride in their accomplishments. Children need to develop the capacity to experience, express, and gain self-control over their emotions and social interactions in order to mature socially and emotionally. This development is enhanced through nurturing relationships and positive early learning experiences.

A consistent and predictable environment strengthens a child's confidence in approaching new challenges. Confident children approach new tasks and situations enthusiastically. They recognize and express emotions appropriately as well as share information about themselves and others.

Social and emotional development is the building block of children's **cognitive development** and lifelong learning. This domain becomes the foundation for helping children understand themselves, form constructive social relationships and relate to the larger world.

2) **Approaches to Learning-** Approaches to learning refer to observable behaviors that indicate ways children become engaged in social interactions and learning experiences. Children's approaches to learning contribute to their success in school and influence their development and learning in other domains. For example, curiosity is a prerequisite of the scientist, and reasoning and problem solving are as necessary for social relationships as they are for mathematics. Children's ability to stay focused, interested, and engaged in activities supports a range of positive outcomes, including cognitive, language, and social and emotional development. It allows children to acquire new knowledge, learn new skills, and set and achieve goals for themselves. Many early learning experts view approaches to learning as one of the most important domains of early childhood development.

When adults provide an engaging environment that allows children to explore and create independently, using their own approach to a learning situation, children will be

better equipped for kindergarten and to take advantage of Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards (aka Common Core).

3) **Language and Literacy-** Daily exposure to verbal and written language provides young children with the opportunities to begin acquiring a basic understanding of the concepts of **literacy** and its functions. Through play and intentional activities, children learn to create meaning from language and communicate with others using verbal and non-verbal language, pictures, symbols and print.

Environments rich with print, language, storytelling, books, technology, and writing materials allow children to experience the joy and power associated with reading and writing, while mastering basic concepts about print. The preschool environment should be respectful and supportive of children's cultural heritages and home languages while encouraging English language acquisition. The abilities to listen, speak, read, and write emerge interdependently in environments designed to meet each child's unique skills, abilities, interests, and needs.

4) **Mathematics-** Mathematic knowledge, interests, and skills are basic to children's success in school and later life. Mathematics is a way of thinking, knowing, problem solving, and reasoning that is accessible to all children regardless of their prior knowledge and experiences. From a very early age, mathematics helps children connect ideas, develop logical thinking, and question, analyze and understand the world around them.

Through their senses, children embrace mathematics as an integral part of their world. Children thrive in environments that promote thinking and curiosity, are rich in mathematical language, and nurture their natural drive to explore and experiment with numbers, shapes, measurement, and patterns. Spontaneous and planned math experiences that are developmentally appropriate encourage children's positive attitudes toward mathematics.

5) **Science-** Children have a natural sense of wonder and curiosity. Science, for young children, is an active and open-ended search for new knowledge. Children ask questions and seek answers in order to understand the world around them. Children learn by being actively engaged with hands-on experiences, real objects and natural, relevant occurrences.

As children seek answers, they will plan, observe, predict, and form conclusions. Children's observations, predications, explanations, and conclusions, correct or incorrect, should be respected and valued by caregivers. Children's experiences through trial and error form the basis for future investigation and thought. Learning through inquiry requires both the child's curiosity and adult guidance.

6) **Social Studies-** The inclusion of Social Studies in early childhood environments is important in order to nurture children's understanding of themselves and others. Social

Studies includes: basic skills and competencies that set the foundation for learning about concepts of social science.

At a young age, children begin to develop their social identity and think about their place in the social world. As children grow, they develop an increased awareness of their personal histories and heritage, and a sense of time and place. Through everyday interactions with children and adults, they develop an appreciation for rights and responsibilities within a group, and how social rules help people in promoting safety and fairness.

7) **Physical Development, Health and Safety**- It is important to recognize that children's physical development and their health and safety have as important a place in the curriculum as other areas of development. Children develop skills necessary for future social and academic success as they explore, combine and refine their physical movements. Thoughtfully planned movement experiences with vigorous outdoor and indoor activities should be part of the daily schedule.

Children in our care deserve environments that are safe and encourage healthy living. Therefore, it is important to model healthy living practices and teach children the importance of good hygiene, a healthy diet and the need for exercise and rest.

8) **Fine Arts**- The arts (including visual arts, music and creative movement, and drama) nurture the imagination and creative spirit of all children. Sensory awareness (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) is the foundation for all imaginative activity and creative expression. For young children, the importance of the arts is in the **process** of creating rather than the end result.

As children are involved in the arts process they develop independence, self-esteem, and self-expression. The arts connect all areas of learning and are fundamental to children's development and education.

The arts enable all children to discover more about who they are and gain insight into their own culture and the cultures around them.

## **B. Curriculum**

The HMH/Scholastic Big Day for Pre-K! is the main curriculum program implemented in all of our classrooms. The HMH/Scholastic Big Day for Pre K! is a holistic, child-centered program that nurtures each child by offering carefully selected and carefully sequenced learning experiences. It provides a wealth of materials and ideas to foster the social emotional, intellectual, and physical development of children. At the same time, it nurtures the natural curiosity and sense of self that can serve as the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

The Big Day for Pre-K! is focused on helping children see the patterns in what they are learning. It builds an understanding of how newly taught material resembles what children already know. Circle Time at the beginning and end of each day, helps children focus on the learning process, reflect on new concepts, and make important connections. Lessons also provide opportunities for children to practice what they have learned.

Our Big Day for Pre-K! curriculum is designed to build a child's healthy self- concept and positive attitude toward school and learning. Children develop concrete skills through experiences with music, art, storytelling, and teacher directed lessons. In addition to skills development, the curriculum emphasizes practice and reflection.

In addition to Big Day for Pre-K!, we use several other supplemental curriculum programs to support the development of students' academic skills. Foundations Pre-K is designed to support students' emerging understanding of the alphabetic principle of letter-sound associations and written language skills with manuscript letter formation. Its purpose is to teach pre-k students the names of the letters and corresponding sounds, as well as teach them the formation of lowercase and uppercase letters.

ORIGO Stepping Stones Pre-K is designed to give young children the best possible preparation for their years of learning mathematics in school and throughout their adult lives. It is a comprehensive program that addresses contemporary standards in Pre-K mathematics, including number, algebra, measurement, geometry, and data. These domains are all connected, and link mathematics to the real world, as well as to other curriculum areas.

The Early Childhood Hands-On Science (ECHOS) curriculum allows teachers to introduce basic science concepts to students through the modeling of science process skills and the use of guided inquiry and exploration. The lessons provide new experiences that will become the foundation for the development of more complex science concepts that will be introduced later in their schooling. The curriculum units are sequenced to present increasingly complex science process skills in the areas of Life, Earth, and Physical sciences.

## **C. Program Descriptions**

### **Community Preschool Programs**

#### **Reggio Inspired** (Pre K)

The Reggio Inspired preschool program is a full day program for 4-5 year old children, which focuses on the educational importance of community and free inquiry as its primary values. The Reggio preschool program provides learning opportunities all in relationship to the children's hands-on project approach while reinforcing and teaching math skills, problem-solving, and literacy skills.

The Reggio Inspired preschool approach to teaching young children puts the natural development of children as well as the close relationships that they share with their environment at the center of its philosophy. Parents are a vital component to the Reggio philosophy and are viewed as partners, collaborators and advocates for their children. The teacher is considered a co-learner and collaborator with the child and not just an instructor. Teachers are encouraged to facilitate the child's learning by planning activities and lessons based on the child's interests, asking questions to further understanding, and actively engaging in the activities alongside the child.

#### **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math** (Pre K)

The STEM Pre-K program is committed to creating a safe and nurturing environment where your child can explore, create and integrate knowledge across the disciplines of **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math**. This program encourages children to think in a more connected and holistic way. Our mission is to care for the emotional, cognitive, social and physical health of your child while simultaneously allowing, encouraging and orchestrating their creativity in a quality-learning environment.

The research is quite clear that the best practice in early childhood education is to break away from passive instruction and allow for more play and investigation, and this kind of learning early in life builds skills and interests that serve children throughout their school years, and later in life. According to Lilian G. Katz, the best practice for early education is to allow students to be active, engaged, and take initiative in their own learning. Long-term research also indicates that being allowed opportunities to take initiative in your own learning is not only good for STEM learning, but for overall long-term academic success.

#### **Kindercademy** (Pre K)

Kindercademy is a preschool program that nurtures each child by providing learning experiences that foster social, physical, emotional, cognitive, and language development in a caring and exciting environment. This program emphasizes teaching foundational skills that will help prepare your child for a successful transition into kindergarten. The Houghton Mifflin Big Day for Pre-K curriculum emphasizes reading



readiness, language, writing, and math. In addition, students are provided extracurricular opportunities such as music, physical education, library, and computer lab.

### **Preschool (3-5 YO)**

Children develop concrete skills through experiences with music, art, storytelling, and teacher-directed lessons. In addition to skills development, the curriculum emphasizes practice and reflection. Tuition based classes are offered as a two, three, or five day weekly programs, and provides a variety of options for families. Preschool sessions are 2.5 hours long, and are offered in the morning or afternoon.

### **Title I Preschool Programs**

The Title I preschool programs are funded through Federal and State funds, and are free to Chandler residents who live within the designated school boundaries. Children develop concrete skills through experiences with music, art, storytelling, and teacher-directed lessons that, in addition to skills development emphasize practice and reflection. Preschool sessions are 3 hours long 5 days a week, and offered in the morning and afternoon. Full day programs are available at several sites.

### **Priority Preschool**

Priority Preschool provides special education services, for children ages 3 to 5 (not of kindergarten age as of September first deadline). Special services to help children reach their developmental milestones include speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. Individual educational programming in the cognitive, language, motor, self-help, and social emotional areas are also designed to meet individual needs of each child.

To be eligible as a preschool special education student, the child must have a comprehensive evaluation and meet eligibility guidelines as a child with a disability. Typically, the child is referred to our school district by an outside agency, medical provider or the parent. The screening determines if a child has a potential disability (meeting state and federal criteria for special education) that requires further evaluation. If so, a full evaluation will be done to determine whether the child is eligible for placement in one of several programs including Priority Preschool. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed by the school district team and parents to meet the child's needs. There is no charge for the PPS program for eligible children to attend.

## **Teacher Qualifications**

All of our preschool classes are taught by certified teachers, and staffed with a teaching assistant. Our goal is to maintain class size at 20 students with a 1:10 adult to child ratio. Priority Preschool classrooms have additional support staff members.

## **D. Portfolios**

A portfolio is a collection of work that is kept on file for each preschooler throughout the school year. The portfolio has writing samples, cutting samples, art projects, and other samples of the child's work. Portfolios are shared with parents during conferences to demonstrate the growth each child has achieved in certain skill areas.

## **E. Progress Monitoring**

Teaching Strategies GOLD is an observational tool that monitors performance and progress. This assessment allows us to assess the children in different classroom activities by observing and recording the preschoolers at work and at play. This assessment is a way for teachers to evaluate and/or assess readiness for kindergarten. This information indicates how your child is progressing in the program, and how we can better provide support that will help them develop the skills needed to be successful in Kindergarten.

## **F. Communication**

To ensure a successful preschool experience, it is important to have good communication between school and home. Newsletters are sent home to help keep parents keep informed about their child's program as well as special events that are planned throughout the school year. We encourage parents to also visit the school's website to view information that is posted on the preschool teacher's webpage.

Parents are welcome to volunteer in classrooms, as well as participate in special celebrations throughout the year. Your child's teacher will provide you with more information on how you can become a parent volunteer.

- **Meet the Teacher-** Parents and preschoolers will have the opportunity to visit the classroom before school is in session. This event helps to ensure a smooth transition on the first day of school.
- **Classroom Visits-** We encourage parents to observe and volunteer in the classroom. This also provides the teacher with help and support as the students learn, play, clean up or transition between activities. Talk to your child's teacher about specific volunteer schedules.

- **Preschool Orientation/Curriculum Night-** Information about your child's preschool program and curriculum is shared at this event. This is an opportunity to learn more about our school and your child's classroom.

## **G. Conferences**

### **Community & Title I Preschool Programs**

Parent-teacher conferences take place two times during the school year. The conferences provide us an opportunity to discuss your child's progress and work together to help them be successful. Parent-Teacher conferences give parents the chance to ask questions about their child's progress, and discuss any concerns they may have. Parent-Teacher conferences will be in August and February.

### **Priority Preschool**

Priority preschool families meet during IEP meetings and receive quarterly progress notes. If families would like additional time to meet with the teacher they may request a conference.

## **Daily Schedule**

Preschool will provide your child with a variety of activities. Teachers implement a program that is a balance between whole group, small group and individual learning opportunities; indoor and outdoor play; as well as child-centered and teacher directed activities. Each classroom offers the following activities in their daily schedule:

- Arrival time
- Table top
- Snack
- Circle time (large group activities, story time, and music)
- Center time (individual work in class learning areas)
- Clean up
- Music & Movement
- Outdoor play
- Closing

# **Program Services**

## **A. Health Screenings**

During the year, health personnel will assess the children with hearing and vision screenings to ensure that students do not have a problem with their hearing or vision. If there are concerns, parents or guardians will be notified so the child can be taken for a follow-up visit with their physician.

## **B. Parent Education**

Chandler Unified School District offers families, through the Chandler Care Center, a wide variety of services for families. These services include health care, dental care, GED classes and ESL classes. The Chandler Care Center is located on the North East corner of the Galveston Elementary School Campus. For more information, call 480-812-7900.

## **C. Screening and Referral Process**

A Pre-Kindergarten screening tool is used to assess children's abilities within the first 45 days of attendance which reviews: vision, hearing, communication, social/emotional/behavioral, sensory, motor and adaptive skills. If there are developmental concerns the teacher will provide the parents with contact information to the CUSD Preschool Assessment Center where a screening will be conducted to determine if your child has a potential disability that requires further evaluation. If you have any questions regarding the screening process please call (480)883-4236.

# School Policies

## A. Attendance

Please make sure that your child attends school regularly unless they are ill. If your child is going to be absent, please call the school office to report the absence. It is important for your child to attend school regularly, so they can be successful in school and gain the necessary readiness skills for kindergarten. If your child does not attend on a regular basis, your child will be withdrawn from the program to allow another student to attend, who is on a waiting list. Daily sign-in and sign-out notebooks are located in each Preschool classroom. Each child attending our preschools should be signed in and out by a responsible adult that is noted on the emergency card each day. Any changes in the emergency card are to be submitted in writing. In case of an emergency, parents may give verbal authorization so an adult other than those on file are able to drop off or pick up their child. Anyone other than the parent that is picking up a child is to show proper identification before the child is released.

- **Reporting absences-** Please call the attendance clerk at your school if your child is going to be absent for the day. If you do not report your child's absence, the absence will be indicated as unexcused. When a child is absent for more than 10 consecutive days, and the absences are not reported, your child's unexcused absences will result in being withdrawn from the program.
- **Daily arrival-** Please make sure your child arrives to school on time daily. There is no adult supervision before or after school hours.
- **Dismissal time-** Please make sure to be on time to pick up your child at the end of the school day. In case of an emergency, please contact the office to notify the teacher of any delays.
- **Late Arrival-** If you are more than 10 minutes late, you will need to park by the office and check in at the office before coming to the classroom. Do not leave any child unattended in the car, and watch all children at all times while on campus.

## B. Discipline

Because social growth is so crucial during the early childhood years, the CUSD Preschool programs help children learn appropriate behaviors for the classroom. Teacher's expectations will match and respect all children's developing capabilities. We believe discipline problems can be avoided by focusing on positive behavior and directing children's energy and curiosity toward healthy, positive interactions.

Appropriate behavior is essential to learning and growing and should be based upon mutual respect for the rights and property of others, respect for those placed in authority, and respect for every student. No one will be allowed to jeopardize the

health, safety, or learning environment of other children. Any inappropriate choices a child makes during school hours may result in consequences such as redirection, loss of privileges, or a brief conference with the teacher or principal. Your child's teacher will notify you if your child has continuing behavior problems so that we can help him/her have a more successful experience the following day.

A parent who has concerns about difficulties that their child is experiencing, should initially speak with the classroom teacher. Arrangements will be made to provide time for the teacher to meet with a parent, and a translator will be provided if necessary. A plan of action will be developed and implemented. If further support is necessary to resolve the concern, the principal will meet with the parents to offer further support and assistance.

For more severe or continuous problems, one or more of the following may result: incident report, parent conference with the principal, suspension, and/or removal from the program. An example of the progression of disciplinary practices for continuously unsafe behavior may include:

- ◇ Immediately following the incident, parent will be called to pick up the student. An incident report will be created for parent's review and a signed copy will stay at the site. Parent will receive a copy of the report.
- ◇ Any future violations of this policy will result in a 2-day suspension.
- ◇ Further violation of the policy will result in a 5-day suspension.
- ◇ Any violation will result in removal from the program.

CUSD Early Childhood Program leadership reserves the right to automatically withdraw any student at any time if behaviors jeopardize the overall safety of the program.

## **C. Health and Safety**

- **First Aid Kits** – First Aid kits are available in each preschool classroom for administering first aid if necessary. In addition, staff is required to have a kit available at all times during any outdoor activity time.
- **Emergency Procedures**- If a minor injury occurs, your child will be taken to the health office for treatment. The parent will be notified at the time of dismissal or a note will be sent home. In case of a serious injury, first aid will be administered. Parents will be notified immediately to pick up child for further care. If a parent cannot be located, an emergency contact will be called to pick up the child.
- **Medications**- CUSD policies will be followed if the student needs to take a prescribed medication. Medications can only be administered by the school health assistant or nurse.

- **Illness-** Please keep your child home when they have a fever, diarrhea, vomiting, sore throat or any other contagious infection. Child needs to be symptom free for 24 hours before they may return to school.
- **Insurance-** Chandler Unified School District provides property and casualty liability coverage for each of our preschool classrooms.
- **Personal Belongings-** It is important that children do not bring the following items to school: gum, snacks, toys or personal items from home. Items that are valuable or breakable may become lost in the classroom. Toy weapons are not allowed on campus at any time.
- **Hygiene-** To keep all of our children healthy, students are required to wash their hands on arrival, before and after snack time, after recess, and after water play. Hand washing prevents the spread of germs, and becomes a lifelong habit. We appreciate your help in reinforcing this routine at home as well.

## **D. Dress Code**

Simple play clothes are appropriate for preschool. Children interact with paints, markers, glitter, and glue, and there may be spills at snack time. Children also are running, jumping, and climbing during free play time. Good supportive shoes should be worn on a daily basis. Most playgrounds are covered with wood chips that can injure children's feet if sandals are worn. Socks and tennis shoes are always the best footwear for preschoolers. Some sites may require a dress code.

## **E. Late Pick Up**

We understand that emergencies do occur. However, our policy for late pick up is as follows: \$1.00 per 5 minutes, per child after the end of the scheduled class time.

If you are going to be late, please first contact your child's teacher. If you cannot reach the teacher, please contact the school's attendance clerk. If you are going to be more than 20 minutes late, please ask someone else on your pick-up list to come for your child, however, late fees will be applied.

If you call before arriving late, you and the staff will be able to work out the details prior to your arrival. The late pick up fee will be posted to your Community Education account and payment will be processed against the card you have on file in your Community Education account.

If you fail to pick up your child/ren at the scheduled pick up time without notice, or arrange for someone else to pick them up, the site will make two attempts to contact

you. If we are unable to contact a parent, we will contact the emergency person(s) listed on your child's emergency form to advise them that your child remains in our care without notice to you. If, for any reason, there is no telephone service we will contact the police to request assistance in contacting a parent or emergency contact person.

The preschool site agrees to keep your child for one hour after the stated pickup time, with late fees accruing, before contacting the local police, if contact cannot be made with a parent/guardian or emergency contact person. We agree to not discuss your tardiness in arriving with your child beyond reassuring them that you or someone they know will be there soon to pick them up.

The Parent/Guardian agrees to advise the preschool teacher immediately of any changes regarding their personal contact information, to include address and phone numbers, for home, work, and cell phones. Parent/Guardian also agrees to provide immediate notice to the preschool teacher of any changes in emergency contacts or contingency people.



# Supporting Learning At Home

For children to be successful, parents and teachers need to work together as a team. You are your child's first teacher and we value and appreciate your participation, suggestions, and support. Please contact us at any time if you have any questions or need our assistance. We look forward to a great school year!

Below are some suggested activities parents can do at home with their child to help reinforce the skills that are introduced at school.

- 1) READ to your child at least once a day and have your child retell the story to you.
- 2) As you are driving in the car, shopping, or around your home, look for the letter of the week. Also have your child try to read signs on the road or in the stores.
- 3) Practice counting with your child.
- 4) Practice colors and shapes with your child.
- 5) Help your child practice writing his/her name.
- 6) Allow your child to do small, simple chores at home. It makes them feel important and gives them a sense of responsibility.
- 7) Have your child tell you about their day and what they have learned in school.



**WELCOME TO PRESCHOOL!**