



Early Childhood Parent Handbook

Our Mission

Des Moines Public Schools Early Childhood Programs will provide quality learning experiences to promote growth of young children and their families and prepare them for kindergarten.

Contact Information The Enrollment Center

Phone: 515-242-7234

Fax: 515-242-7862

www.dmschools.org

Equity Statement

It is the policy of the Des Moines Community School District not to illegally discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age (for employment), marital status (for programs), sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status (for programs) in its educational programs and its employment practices. There is a grievance procedure for processing complaints of discrimination. If you believe you have (or your child has) been discriminated against or treated unjustly at school contact Jacob Cummings, Equity and Inclusion Manager at 2100 Fleur Drive, Des Moines, IA 50321; phone: 515-242-7709; email: jacob.cummings@dmschools.org.

Welcome From the Des Moines Public Schools Early Childhood Staff

Dear Families,

Welcome!

We are looking forward to a successful year for you and your child in our Des Moines Public Schools Early Childhood Program.

We believe the Des Moines Public Schools Early Childhood programs enjoy their good reputation largely because of the support of our families. Your participation is the key to the success of our programs. We encourage your involvement. We welcome it.

We have prepared this Early Childhood Parent Handbook for your information. The handbook should answer most of your questions. If you have additional questions, please contact your child's teacher or classroom staff.

Feel free to call or stop by the office to visit the classroom.

Sincerely,

Des Moines Public Schools Early Childhood Program Staff

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Our Curriculum and Assessment

Our Early Childhood curriculum is literacy-based and is designed to provide young children with many ways of playing and interacting with others and the learning environment. Teachers use the Houghton Mifflin Pre-K curriculum, Second Step, PBIS, Scaffolding Early Literacy (SEL) and Mature Play with play plans, as well as additional research-based strategies to help us meet the needs of our diverse population. The State of Iowa has developed Early Learning Standards that provide the foundation for our programs. By following the Standards listed below, we are ensuring that all children receive a comprehensive and developmentally appropriate experience that prepares them for kindergarten. Teachers assess the progress of each child using a variety of tools. Teachers use screening tools to identify a student's interests as well as their needs. Teaching Strategies Gold is used to monitor children's progress, and the information gathered assists with planning instruction. Student portfolios are also created to show progress over time. Parents receive information about their child's progress during home visits, conferences and as needed throughout the school year.

Iowa Early Learning Standards

- Physical Well-Being and Motor Development
 - Healthy and Safe Living
 - Large Motor Development
 - Fine Motor Development
- Approaches to Learning
 - Curiosity and Initiative
 - Engagement and Persistence
 - Reasoning and Problem Solving
 - Play and Senses
- Social and Emotional Development
 - Self
 - Self-Regulation
 - Relationships with Adults
 - Relationships with Children
- Communication, Language, and Literacy
 - Language Understanding and Use
 - Early Literacy
 - Early Writing
- Mathematics and Science
 - Comparison and Number
 - Patterns
 - Shapes and Spatial Relationships
 - Scientific Reasoning
 - Scientific Investigations and Problem Solving
 - Measurement
- Creative Arts
 - Art
 - Music, Rhythm, and Movement
 - Dramatic Play
- Social Studies
 - Awareness of family and community
 - Awareness of culture
 - Awareness of the relationship between people and the environment in which they live

- Awareness of the past

GENERAL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES



Attendance

Good attendance is important for school success. Your child should attend school every day, except when they are ill. It is also important for students to arrive on time each day for the following reasons:

- Children learn the routine and feel comfortable when they know what to expect daily.
- Children begin and end the day as a group. It is important to begin and end the day on a positive note.
- The teacher plans each part of your child's day. If your child is frequently tardy they will miss important learning opportunities.
- Children begin to develop good habits and a positive attitude about school attendance.

Parents must call the classroom to report when their child will be absent. You will receive the phone number to call to report an absence.

- If your child is absent and staff does not hear before the specified time, you will be contacted to determine the cause of the absence.
- If your child has a record of unexplained or frequent absences, your child may no longer be able to participate in the program. If your child is repeatedly tardy, leaves early or is left at the center after the program day (morning or afternoon) your child may no longer be able to participate in the program.



Educational Equity Statement

It is the policy of the Des Moines Community School District not to illegally discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age (for employment), marital status (for programs), sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status (for programs) in its educational programs and its employment practices. There is a grievance procedure for processing complaints of discrimination. If you believe you have (or your child has) been discriminated against or treated unjustly at school, please contact Jacob Cummings, Equity and Inclusion Manager at 2100 Fleur Drive, Des Moines, IA 50321; phone: 515-242-7709; email: jacob.cummings@dmschools.org.



Pick Up Policy

Children will only be released to an authorized adult as determined by the guardian. Authorization must be given on the Emergency and Pick-Up Permission form by the parent or legal guardian. The names and telephone numbers of adults authorized to pick up your child must appear on this form. **Families should provide as many emergency contacts as possible for emergencies. Please keep these numbers updated if your phone number changes or is disconnected.**



School Cancellation/Closing

The DMPS Early Childhood classrooms follow the Des Moines Public School's calendar and are closed when the public schools are closed. The school calendar is available from your center staff or online at the Des Moines Public Schools website: www.dmschools.org

If Des Moines Public Schools are closed due to bad weather, Early Childhood programs will be closed too. For half-day classrooms: in the case of delayed start the AM class will be cancelled, and in the case of early dismissal the PM class will be cancelled. Please check local television, radio or the DMPS website for information on school closings.

There may also be days when early childhood classes need to be canceled due to staff illness and appropriate substitutes are not available. Families will be notified as soon as possible.



Toys from Home

Please do not send toys to school. Everything that children need for a successful early childhood experience is provided. The school district has a **zero tolerance policy** regarding guns, knives and other weapons, including toy weapons. District Early Childhood programs follow this policy. You may find the policy on the district website www.dmschools.org in the Elementary Parent Handbook.

HEALTH



Accident or Illness

- Parents will be contacted immediately in case of serious illness or accident. Preschool staff provides written incident reports to parents when there are minor injuries, minor changes in health status, or behavioral concerns. Accident reports will be completed at the discretion of the school nurse for injuries that require medical attention.
- Please notify the classroom if your emergency contact numbers change, so we can contact you in case of illness or emergency.
- Parents who are working or going to school are encouraged to have a “back-up” plan for a sick child.
- Everyone must wash their hands when entering the classroom.



Communicable Disease Policy

Please keep your child home if they have any of the following symptoms

Symptom or disease:	Child may not attend class until:
Diarrhea	Free of diarrhea for 24 hours
Fever – 100.4 degrees by mouth	Fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medicine
Impetigo	24 hours after treatment is started
Pink eye	Note from doctor
Rash with fever	Note from doctor
Ring worm	24 hours after treatment is started, cover
Vomiting	Free of vomiting for 24 hours

- You will be contacted and asked to pick up your child if he or she becomes ill at school.
- Please notify the classroom if your child has a communicable disease
- The classroom will post notices of exposure of children to a communicable disease.

Please keep your child at home if he or she has an illness that is contagious OR:

- Prevents them from being comfortable at school (for example-ear infection or continuous coughing).
- Your child needs more care than the staff can provide without affecting the health and safety of other children.



Head Lice

If your child has head lice, you may be asked to pick your child up from school and begin to treat the lice. The school nurse can provide additional information upon request.



Medication Policy

Families are encouraged to give medication at home where children are under the supervision of a parent/guardian. Occasionally, children will need to take medication at school or have medication available for an emergency. The school district's medication policy is as follows:

- Only nurses or other trained district staff will give medicine to a child at school
- The parent or guardian must sign the [Request For Giving Medicine At School](#) form which can be found at dmschools.org.
- The parent must personally deliver medicine in its original pharmacy container to the teacher or school nurse.
- No over-the-counter medications will be given without a doctor's order.



Mental Health

DMPS Early Childhood Programs recognize the importance of mental wellness in our children and our families. Our goal is to assure that each child and family is supported in handling life's challenges in effective ways. Building support staff, community agencies and resources are available to our families and children. One of our resources, the Student Assistance Program, is available to every student in the Des Moines Public Schools. For more information, please contact the school office.



Nutrition

Nutritious meals or snacks are served to all children. Children will be served only food prepared by DMPS employees. All food served meets the nutritional requirements of the Federal school lunch program.

- **Parents are not to bring or send any food to the classroom. This includes edible birthday treats such as cake, cookies, candy, etc.** Parents are encouraged to bring in a special book to share and read to the class or other nonfood related treats.
- **Let us know if your child has any food allergies or religious food preferences.** If your child has a food allergy, the Diet Modification Request Form must be completed by your child's health care provider and returned to your teacher/school nurse. This form can be found at dmschools.org.
- We encourage children's independence and decision-making by allowing them to choose the foods and the amount they want to eat. "Clean plates" are not emphasized. Food is **never** used as a reward or punishment. Mealtimes are opportunities for children to practice their communication and social skills.



Physical, Dental, Immunization Forms & Screenings

Physical Examination, Dental Examination and Immunization

- Children are required to have a current physical and valid certificate of immunization on file at all times. Physicals are due within 30 days of enrollment.
- A dental examination is required within 90 days of enrollment.
- If your child does not have a doctor or dentist, a list of providers can be provided upon request.

Screenings

- Screenings provide important information about your child's health. Each child will have a vision, hearing, growth, dental, speech, and developmental screening. If you do not want your child to participate, please notify the school nurse in writing.



Toilet Training

- Children who are not potty trained can attend preschool. The goal of our of our toilet training policy is to promote developmentally appropriate self-help skills and independence.
- If your child is not toilet trained teachers will ask for your help in developing a toilet training plan for your child that is appropriate to his/her needs. This plan will include full involvement from you as the parent/guardian.
- Expectations for families may include frequent toileting of the child while at home, establishing a consistent routine, providing extra clothing/diapers/pull-ups/wipes for use at school if needed. Pull Ups are preferred to help encourage the child's independence.
- All families are encouraged to keep a change of clothing for their child at school, in case of toileting accidents, or spills.
- Please contact the school nurse for more information or to see the complete Toilet Training Policy.

SAFETY



Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

All classroom teachers are mandatory reporters as required by local and state laws.

If you suspect a child under the age of 18 is being abused or neglected please call:

- **The Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-362-2178** (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Please be ready to provide identifying information and the whereabouts of the child. You may remain anonymous unless you are making a report as a mandatory reporter. If you are making report as a mandatory reporter, you must leave your name and contact information.

If you believe the child is in imminent danger, **CALL 911 immediately.**



Clothing Suggestions

Please dress your child in clothing appropriate for play. Tennis shoes or other shoes with rubber soles should be worn.

For safety reasons:

- Avoid flip-flops and other loose fitting shoes.
- Avoid or remove drawstrings on jackets and coats.
- Avoid having students wear jewelry (necklaces, long dangly earrings) they may be lost, broken or present a danger while playing.

We go outside every day, weather permitting. When the weather is cold, please dress your child warmly in hat, coat, gloves and long pants. In warm weather, please apply sunscreen at home. If you need assistance obtaining appropriate clothing for your child, talk to your classroom staff.



Discipline and Guidance

In the DMPS Early Childhood Programs, our overall goal is prepare children for kindergarten. To support this goal, we provide our students guidance and practice in developing social skills. Early Childhood teachers use the 2nd Step curriculum and PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) to teach developmentally appropriate social skills. When a child's behavior affects his/her ability to handle the classroom environment, a meeting with the center team and support staff will occur. The team may be made up of the following people: parent/guardian, teacher, teacher associate, nurse, social worker, and Special Education staff. This team will develop a plan to assist the child. Parents may also contact Early Childhood Special Education directly at 515-242-8213.

Here are some of the types of guidance used in our programs and examples of how they might also be used at home:

- **Positive Redirection:** For example, children are throwing toys. A *positive redirection* would be to give the children beanbags and a basket for a beanbag toss as an appropriate alternative.
- **Ignoring misbehavior when appropriate:** Often the best way to discourage negative behavior like showing-off or pouting is to ignore it. Instead pay attention and praise the child when he or she demonstrates positive behavior.
- **Choices to control the situation and not the child:** Use choices with limits. Instead of saying, “Do you want to ride in your car seat?” You might say, “Do you want to hold your book or your toy while you are in your car seat?”
- **Use “First—Then statements:** For example, “**First** put on your coat, **then** we will go outside.”
- **Use of natural and logical consequences:** *Natural:* “You splashed water on the floor when you were washing your hands, so you need to help clean it up.” *Logical:* “You hit a child with this toy; so I’m going to put this toy away for today.”
- **Acknowledging children’s feelings:** By helping children recognize and name their own feelings they begin to learn that people may have different feelings about the same things, and that’s ok. This also helps children begin to control the behaviors associated with strong feelings.
- **The DMPS Preschool programs do not use corporal punishment of any kind.**

The Elementary and Early Childhood Parent Handbook, which includes the district’s full Student Discipline Code is available online at www.dmschools.org or you may contact your school office for more information.

Des Moines School Board Policy 505

The Board, administration and employees expect students to conduct themselves in a manner fitting to their age level and maturity and with respect and consideration for the rights of others. Students, teachers, employees, and visitors are expected to treat each other with respect and courtesy so that all may be safe within the school environment. Inappropriate student conduct may cause material and substantial disruption to the school environment, interfere with the rights of others, or present a threat to the health and safety of students, employees, and visitors on school premises.

These behaviors will be documented in a Behavior Incident Report in Infinite Campus. This will become part of the student’s permanent record. Parents/guardians will be notified when a Behavior Incident Report is written and the report can be viewed by the parent/guardian through the Parent Portal in Infinite Campus.

State of Iowa Annual Notice

Notice: Corporal Punishment, Restraint, and Physical Confinement and Detention

State law forbids school employees from using corporal punishment against any student. Certain actions by school employees are not considered corporal punishment. Additionally, school employees may use “reasonable and necessary force, not designed or intended to cause pain” to do certain things, such as prevent harm to persons or property.

State law also places limits on school employees’ abilities to restrain or confine and detain any student. The law limits why, how, where, and for how long a school employee may restrain or confine and detain a child. If a child is restrained or confined and detained, the school must maintain documentation and must provide certain types of notice to the child’s parent.

If you have any questions about this state law, please contact your school. The complete text of the law and additional information is available on the Iowa Department of Education’s web site: www.iowa.gov/educate.



Environmental Safety

- Teachers and school staff are responsible for the supervision, guidance and safety of children throughout the school day.
- Parents and guardians have unrestricted access to their own child (except during a building lock-down.)
- The school district has written emergency plans for fire, tornado, flood, intruders, intoxicated parent, lost or abducted children, power failures, bomb threats, chemical spills, earthquakes, and blizzards. These plans include evacuation sites. Emergency evacuation plans are posted at all exits. Emergency numbers for police, fire department, Poison Control Center and ambulance service are posted by all phones. Children's emergency information is accessible to staff. The DMPS safety brochure is available in the school office.
- All full-time teachers have current First Aid and CPR certification.
- No smoking is allowed within the facility, or on the playground.
- First aid kits are clearly labeled and available within the center and in the outdoor play area.
- All classrooms clean and sanitize surfaces as indicated in the Cleaning and Sanitation Frequency Table. Please contact the classroom teacher for a copy of the table.
- All staff are certified in Universal Precautions to protect against the spread of potentially infectious body fluids. Please contact the school nurse for detailed information.



Lock-Down

A lock-down is a safety measure we take in response to a threat directly to the school or in the surrounding neighborhood. As a part of the District Emergency Response Plan, all school buildings hold lock-down drills, just as we do fire and tornado drills. The teachers talk with students and read a story about lockdown drills prior to the first drill.

During a lock-down:

- All school activities are moved indoors.
- Exterior doors and classroom doors are locked.
- No one is allowed to enter or exit the building. Parents may not enter or exit the school during a lock-down. This is for your safety and the safety of your child.

Parents: Please be sure that the teacher has your most up-to-date emergency contact information. In the event of a lock-down or other emergency, school staff will use that information to contact you.

Following a lock-down, parents will be informed that the school was placed on lock-down, the nature of the incident, and how long the lock-down was in place.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS and FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The DMPS Early Childhood Programs work with each family to create the best possible experiences for their child's growth and social development. We believe that:

- You are your child's first and best teacher.
- Children do best when parents and classroom teachers work together.
- Parents who support and extend their child's learning contribute to their child's success both in school and in life.
- Parent input is vital to program improvement. Input can be provided through parent surveys, participation in monthly policy committee meetings, and monthly early childhood advisory committee meetings.



Home Visits and Conferences

- Family visiting is an important part of our Early Childhood program. These visits usually take place in the child's home. Early childhood staff will make **one or two** visits to your home a year. Ideally, the first visit takes place before the child starts in the classroom.
- There will also be **two parent-teacher conferences** at school per year. During visits and conferences teachers will share information about your child's progress. You can share information, strengths and concerns about your child at this time. This information is helpful to the teaching staff as they plan learning activities for your child and the other children in the classroom.
- Parents and guardians may request additional conferences with staff any time.



Lending Libraries

Classrooms have a lending library set up for you and your child. These books and materials can be checked out to read at home and then returned to school. Check with your child's teacher to find out how you can check out books.



Newsletters

A monthly newsletter will keep you informed of classroom, school and community-based activities and opportunities. Check your child's backpack regularly for notes and other classroom information.



Parent and Child Together Time (PACT time)

PACT time stands for Parent and Child Together time and consists of regularly-scheduled opportunities for parents and their children to play and work together in the classroom as a way to promote kindergarten readiness skills. PACT Time is a chance for you to spend time with your child at school... it's the perfect way to find out what's happening in your child's classroom and pick up some ideas to help your child learn at home.

Join your child for fun one-on-one activities, we will read a story, sing some songs, or have some other quick, simple activities. You'll also receive ideas to use at home in the form of a weekly PACT time tip sheet. If you are unable to make it to your child's PACT time, you may send another adult family member or friend to participate with your child. For more information about PACT time in your child's classroom, ask your child's teacher.



Homework

Research shows that worksheets and other homework that is typical in older grades is not an effective way for preschoolers to learn. Here are the types of developmentally appropriate homework we use:

1. Weekly PACT time tips sheets contain ideas for quick and fun learning activities you can do at home.
2. Reading books: We know that the more time children spend looking at books and reading with adults the more successful they tend to be when learning to read. You can borrow books from our lending library.
3. Home-to-School connections are a chance during each theme for children and families to bring a part of their experience to the classroom. Your child answers a question and draws a picture and returns the paper to school.
4. Alpha-friends are one of the ways we teach the ABCs. Weekly Alpha-friend booklets include the alpha-friend's picture and the song, along with the upper and lower-case letters to look at, color, trace, or decorate. Encourage your child to sing the Alpha-friend songs for you at home.



School CNXT

School CNXT is a communication application used by Des Moines Public Schools to communicate with families. School CNXT provides translation for many languages. Families new to the district will receive information about how to sign up for School CNXT. Parents who have used School CNXT in previous years at any DMPS school can use the same log-in: their cell phone number or email address and their self-selected password.



School Readiness Goals

School Readiness means that we are working to be sure that, by the end of preschool, children are ready for kindergarten. The Early Childhood department sets specific school readiness goals each year in four areas; reading, math, social skills, and attendance. Look for a poster in your child’s classroom with the goals for this year.



Support Services for Families

Successful early learning starts with strong parent-child relationships and family well-being; by supporting families we know we can help children succeed in school. The Early Childhood Family Support Services team provides services for families ranging from locating resources (for example, finding a dentist, or food assistance) to helping parents with daily routines, to dealing with a child’s challenging behavior.

The Family Support Services Team also helps plan family activities like PACT time, Coffee and Connections, and Family Events.

Please let your child’s teacher know if you want a member of the team to contact you—or call the Early Childhood office at 515-242-7588.



Transition to Kindergarten

One of the goals of the Early Childhood programs is to assist children and families to successfully move from preschool to kindergarten. Families are encouraged to be actively engaged in helping to prepare children for kindergarten by participating in a variety of different activities including home visits, conferences, Family Events, PACT time and related learning and reading activities in the home.

During the spring months,

- For children who are 5 years old on or before September 15th, parents will receive information regarding the neighborhood school for kindergarten along with enrollment/registration information.
- For children who will not be 5 years old by September 15th, parents will receive information about continuing preschool next year.
- For identified students with IEPs, a transition meeting with parents will be scheduled.
- The last three spring PACT times activities will focus on tips for parents to help children prepare for and successfully transition from preschool to summer and back to school in the fall.



Volunteering

Parents are encouraged to participate in our program. Your participation is welcome in the following areas:

- Decision-making about the design and operation of the program
- Helping in the classroom
- Preparing materials for the classroom
- Developing and participating in activities for parents

All prospective volunteers must complete a volunteer application and consent to a background check including but not limited to screening for assault, felony convictions, child and dependent abuse charges. The volunteer application is available online www.dmschools.org or in your school office.

Website

The web address for DMPS Preschool programs is www.preschool.dmschools.org. –a great resource for preschool information, upcoming events, and contact information for staff.



In-Kind Federal Government Match

The Head Start program receives matching dollars for services benefiting the program. Please be sure to sign in when you volunteer, attend PACT time or parent activities, or donate supplies to be used in the classroom.

Head Start Policy Committee

The Policy Committee, made up of elected classroom parent representatives and community representatives, participates in the policy and decision-making process of Head Start. The Policy Committee serves as a link between center parents, other district Head Start parents, the community, the DMPS School Board and the grantee, Drake University Head Start. The DMPS School Board assigns a liaison to this committee.

The Policy Committee initiates suggestions and ideas for program improvements and helps make decisions about the program. Parents serving on this committee are elected by each classroom's parents and represent their classroom at monthly Policy Committee meetings. Reimbursement for the cost of transportation to meetings and childcare during meetings is available. ALL parents are welcome to participate. If you want to know more about Policy Committee, please ask your child's teacher.

Head Start Policy Council

Drake University Head Start Policy Council, made up of parents and community representatives, participates in the policy and decision-making process of Head Start. The Policy Council serves as a link between public and private organizations, Des Moines Public Schools Policy Committee, the grantee board of directors and the general community. Policy Council representatives participate in shared decision making, including policy and procedures, budget, program planning, and human resources management. DMPS parents serving on this council are elected from Policy Committee and represent our district classrooms at monthly Policy Council meetings. Reimbursement for the cost of transportation to meetings and childcare during meetings is available.