

# Georgia Elementary School Preschool Handbook 2023-2024

*A play based inclusive preschool program*



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## **WELCOME**

Welcome to Georgia Elementary School's Early Education Program! We look forward to having your child in our program and working with you to meet your child's needs. This handbook explains our program's philosophy, goals, procedures and policies. Please feel free to ask questions and make suggestions. We believe that you are your child's first and main teacher and look forward to being an educational partner with you on behalf of your child.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of our district's Early Education program is to nurture young children's sense of wonder while laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning through a play based, inclusive environment.

## **PHILOSOPHY**

The GEMS early education program is based on the belief that young children learn best through active involvement in their environment and develop their skills and knowledge through these experiences. This involvement promotes the growth and development of the whole child; physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

We believe that children learn best in a hands-on environment that is nurturing, inviting, and supportive to experiment and take risks. Ultimately, children are encouraged to embrace their own specific learning style. Our classroom learning environments are designed to make children feel safe physically, psychologically, socially and intellectually. This environment allows children to explore and interact with adults, other children and to self select a variety of materials and activities. With compassion and insight, we implement best practices in our work with young children across all developmental domains.

Teachers focus on developing relationships, taking time to get to know all children, their families and backgrounds, their interests and passions, their learning styles and the way they think. Teachers act as facilitators: asking questions, presenting challenges, and supporting the children's efforts to make meaning. Teachers also take a more active role by introducing new content, ideas and materials. Teachers create a community within the classroom where all children feel encouraged to share ideas and opinions. They observe, document, cheer and reflect in order to

nurture children's self esteem and skill development. The children learn as much from each other as they do from adults in their learning community.

Teachers include families in the learning community. Each child's family and cultural identity is respected as partnerships are formed between home and school. Ongoing communication is vital so that teachers and families work together to support the uniqueness of each child's learning and development. Teachers are architects of a community of learners, wherein all children have a sense of belonging. Working together, teachers and families can fortify this sensibility outside of home and school, constructing a caring community into which every child can step with confidence. Childhood, we believe, is of itself important and to be cherished.

### **PROGRAM GOALS**

Our Early Education Program will provide:

- A child-centered environment that encourages competence and self esteem.
- A positive, non-competitive atmosphere that fosters the acceptance of the uniqueness of self and others.
- A physical setting that allows a child to safely explore self-selected activities.
- An inclusive program that meets the needs of all children.
- A learning environment in which teaching means facilitating a child's intellectual growth through guided discovery in a prepared environment.
- An experiential, hands on curriculum flexible enough to meet individual and group needs.
- Developmentally sequenced activities that not only contribute to a child's total progress but are also enjoyable and meaningful.
- Effective communication skills (oral, written, listening, reading) that are interwoven into the child's daily experiences.
- Opportunities for family involvement that strengthen the educational program, enhance the child's experiences, and lay a foundation for the future of the home-school partnership.
- An assessment of each child's ongoing educational and developmental needs in terms of physical, emotional, social and intellectual growth.

## **BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT**

The positive approach to behavior management demonstrates the teacher's respect for children and their expectation that students will do their best. In the preschool classroom, the focus is on guiding children's behavior in positive ways so they learn self-discipline. Children are encouraged to express themselves by talking through their problems when conflicts arise. Teachers support children in making choices to change inappropriate behavior. Teachers act as mediators, modeling and facilitating communication rather than directly solving children's problems. On occasion, a child with challenging behaviors will need a plan with goals developed jointly by the school staff and family to help the child learn more appropriate skills and to ensure the safety of the child and others within the classroom. Our goal is to maintain all children within our program. Our goal is to help children learn how to interact in acceptable ways, become "problem solvers" themselves, and relate to others in a caring and respectful manner.

## **EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM STAFF and CONTACT INFORMATION**

<b>Early Childhood Special Educator and Program Director</b>	<b>Julie Johnson</b>	<a href="mailto:jjohnson@fwsu.org">jjohnson@fwsu.org</a>	<b>524-6358 x21113</b>
<b>Early Education Teachers</b>	<b>Stephanie Brogle</b>	<a href="mailto:sbrogle@fwsu.org">sbrogle@fwsu.org</a>	<b>524-6358 x 21101</b>
	<b>Morgan Garrow</b>	<a href="mailto:mgarrow@fwsu.org">mgarrow@fwsu.org</a>	<b>524-6358 x 21102</b>
	<b>Ella Justman</b>	<a href="mailto:ejustman@fwsu.org">ejustman@fwsu.org</a>	<b>524-6358 x 21103</b>
<b>Speech/Language Pathologist</b>	<b>Kristine Jenkins</b>	<a href="mailto:kjenkins@fwsu.org">kjenkins@fwsu.org</a>	<b>524-6358 x 21112</b>
<b>Social Emotional Specialist</b>	<b>Brittany Sweet</b>	<a href="mailto:bsweet@fwsu.org">bsweet@fwsu.org</a>	<b>524-6358 x 22109</b>

Early Education Paraprofessionals	Amanda Gaudette	<a href="mailto:agaudette@fwsu.org">agaudette@fwsu.org</a>	Please call respective classrooms to contact them by phone.
	Amy Popovitch	<a href="mailto:apopovitch@fwsu.org">apopovitch@fwsu.org</a>	
	Moria Routhier	<a href="mailto:mrouthier@fwsu.org">mrouthier@fwsu.org</a>	
	Catherine Schoonejongen	<a href="mailto:cschoonejongen@fwsu.org">cschoonejongen@fwsu.org</a>	

### **ADMINISTRATION AND CONTACT INFO**

Pre-K-8 Principal  
 Director of Teaching and Learning  
 Dean of Students  
 Director of Communications  
 Student Support Services  
 Director of Curriculum  
 Superintendent

Steve Emery  
 Karen Lehning  
 Melissa Fisher  
 Corrina Favreau  
 Rachel McIntyre  
 Scott Thompson  
 John Tague

School Telephone  
 School Fax Number  
 School Website

802-524-6358  
 802-524-1781  
[www.gemsvt.org](http://www.gemsvt.org)

### **PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

Early Ed. Daily Schedule

GEMS

M,T,Th,F mornings

8:00-11:00

M,T,Th,F afternoons

12:00-3:00

\*\*\*There is no preschool on Wednesdays.\*\*\*

## **SCHOOL CLOSINGS or DELAYS**

Notification of school closing will begin around 6:00 a.m. via GEMS School Message System. Other means of notification will be made over radio stations (VPR, WWSR, WVMT, WXXX, WIZN) and television stations (Channel 5 and Channel 3).

Delay: In the event of a school delay, the morning preschool sessions will be canceled.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **DROP OFF/PICK UP- SIGNING IN/OUT**

Child-care licensing regulations require that your child be signed into and out of the classroom each day. Teachers will sign children in and out of the classroom by writing the time in and out of the program as well as the family member or guardian who dropped off or picked up. Preschoolers can get dropped off at the Pre-K/K playground gate entrance. Parents should park their car in a parking space and walk their children to an adult who is waiting to greet them or to their classroom door. Parents may walk their child into their classroom door. Preschool families and guardians will follow the school's drop off traffic pattern and drop off their child at the Pre-K/K playground sidewalk that leads to the preschool classrooms.

End of session preschool pickups will happen on the preschool playground. Please wait at the gate and an adult will bring your child to you. Only those people listed on your pick up authorization form will be allowed to pick up your child from preschool. School staff may ask an unfamiliar person for an ID to confirm their identity. **Any changes in your child's typical departure routine will require a note from one of the child's parents or guardians.**

**\*\*\*Morning Arrival: 7:55-8:05 Am**

**\*\*\*Afternoon Arrival: 11:55 Am-12:05 Pm**

**Teachers and staff will open doors to the classroom at 7:55 Am & 11:55 Am, if your family arrives early you will need to wait with your child until the classroom doors open. We will not let children into the classrooms early.**

**\*\*\*Students arriving after the posted arrival times will need to check in at the office and parents will need to walk their child/ren down to the preschool classrooms. Preschool staff will not be able to meet you up in the office.**

### **DAILY NEEDS**

- **Backpack** - It is important that your child has a standard size backpack or bag to transport artwork and other important papers. Please label their backpack with either your child's name or initials. (Keep in mind that backpacks should be large enough to hold a 9x12 folder without bending it, a lunch box, water bottle, library book and extra clothing.
- **Clothing-** For everyday wear, choose simple clothing that can get messy and that your child can handle by him/herself. **Make sure children are properly dressed for the weather as we will be utilizing our outdoor spaces as much as possible.** **Shoes must be worn at school at all times.** When weather requires wearing boots to school, please send shoes to change into. Please provide an extra set of clothing in a labeled Ziploc bag. These clothes will be kept in a labeled Ziploc bag in your child's classroom or in their backpack depending on the teacher's preference. Please **label all clothing**, especially sweaters and jackets that may get left behind. Winter weather clothing is always a challenge to both parents and children alike. Encourage your child to be as helpful and independent as possible when preparing for cold and snowy weather dressing. Suggestions: Sneakers have proven to be the best choice of footwear. Sandals are often unsafe during outdoor play on the mulch and climbing equipment. Mittens are much easier for children to put on than gloves.
- **Pull Ups-** Please send in extra clothing, pull ups and wipes if your child is toilet training. **Communicating directly with our staff is essential so a consistent plan can be followed both at school and home.**
- **Water bottle** - Staying hydrated helps brains and bodies grow. **Please send a clean water bottle with your child daily. Please label with their name.** Water bottles will be stored in backpacks so make sure they don't leak!



- **Lunch Box - Our preschool classrooms are nut-safe this year! Please pack a healthy, nut-safe snack for your child daily.**
- **Every child in Georgia under the age of 18 is eligible to receive free meals for the entire school year with Genuine Foods.** The school is encouraging families to fill out the free and reduced meal application whether or not you believe your family meets the income guidelines. All applications are confidential and can be returned to your child's teacher in an envelope that is labeled for the office. Your child's teacher will be sure to bring it to the office for you.
- Breakfasts and lunches can be set aside and used for snack food at preschool. We will send leftover food home with your child in their lunch box and backpack. The Genuine Foods menu can be found on the school website.

### **CLASSROOM PROGRAM**

The children will participate in a variety of different activities, such as:

- Choice time: promoting development of social and cognitive skills through children's independent activity choices
- Small and large group activities including: language arts, fine motor, social, emotional, literacy, health, music, art, math and/or scientific inquiry, and a circle/meeting time
- Storytime: with stories, puppets, songs and fingerplays
- Large motor activities: outside play and group games

The classroom activities presented will relate to the children's interests. Families will be provided with communication that highlights the learning that occurs in our classrooms through our parent communication system called SeeSaw.

The children in our program are invited to share in other age-appropriate activities that occur at school. These may include puppet shows, concerts, school wide celebrations and other special educational events provided by other classes and community groups.

### **SNACKS**

If you do not want your child to eat Genuine Food meals at school, families are expected to provide nutritious snacks for their children each day that they attend preschool. **Due to allergies, we are requesting that snacks be Nut-Safe.** Federal

guidelines suggest that a preschooler's snack should consist of **at least two** of the following components:

1. Milk ( ½ cup)
2. Meat and meat alternatives ( ½ oz)
3. Vegetables ( ½ cup)
4. Fruits ( ½ cup)
5. Grains( ½ serving)

**Please purchase a lunch box and ice packs to keep your child's snack fresh.** Your child's snack will typically be eaten mid-morning (9:30-10am) or early afternoon (12:30-1:30 pm), depending on your child's classroom schedule. Children will be encouraged to serve and feed themselves. Snack time is an opportunity for adults and children to have wonderful small group conversations and it is a time for meaningful and relevant learning. Please do not send in candy or foods and beverages that have a high sugar content. If children bring candy to school they will be asked to put it away until they go home. **Please plan on sending in utensils for your child to use each day and a clean water bottle for your child to drink out of.**

### **Picture Days In Preschool**

Teachers will send more specific information and picture forms home when we receive our classroom schedule for photos.

## **CELEBRATIONS**

Please consult with your child's teacher to plan birthday celebrations for your child. Your child's teacher has knowledge about the food allergies and sensitivities present in their classroom. We encourage families to be creative and provide special activities that do not involve food.

## **HOLIDAYS**

Holidays are special times when families and cultures celebrate and pass on traditions to children. Customs and traditions among the preschool families are diverse so the preschool does not sponsor or endorse any particular set of holiday practices. We introduce many traditions around the world but leave the religious

aspects of celebrating for families to share at home. We do, however, encourage parents to share their specific traditions and celebrations with our classes.

### **BOOK ORDERS**

Once a month (or on a schedule determined by your child's teacher) we will send home order forms for you to purchase books for your child through one or two of the book clubs that make books available to schools at reasonable prices. Sometimes, we may make suggestions about books that we know are particularly good. Please do not feel you must order books at any time. This is just an option that we extend to parents as an inexpensive way to increase your home library. If you prefer to order online, please let us know and that option can be made available.

When ordering, please make sure that:

1. Your child's name is on the order form
2. Checks are made out to the book club itself (not to the school or teacher)
3. The money and order form is sent in a sealed envelope with your child's name as well as the purpose of the funds ( Book Order) written on the outside

### **PROGRAM COMMUNICATION**

Our main form of communication with families will be Seesaw. Seesaw access is by invitation only so that your child's information can remain confidential. Seesaw is used throughout the school and will be important for you to become familiar with. If you do not have a cell phone, an e-mail address or other forms of technology please let your child's teacher know and we will provide you with communications on paper.

### **PROGRESS REPORTS AND CONFERENCES**

Progress reports will be sent home twice during the school year, typically in late fall and at the end of the school year. Progress reports will reflect your child's performance in the classroom program covering areas such as social interactions, personal responsibility, and basic skill development as assessed through the Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment measure. Specific concerns, if any, will be addressed in a family conference. Family conferences will be scheduled twice a

year (fall and spring) coordinating with progress reports. A conference may be requested by the early education staff or by a child's family at any time during the school year. Please feel free to reach out and contact us at any time.

## **POLICIES**

### **LICENSING AND ACCREDITATION**

- The Early Education Program at Georgia Elementary School has been awarded Five Stars (the highest number awarded) through the State of Vermont's "Step Ahead Recognition System."
- Our program is also licensed through the State of Vermont through the Child Development Division. A copy of the state licensing rules and regulations are available and on display in each classroom.
- We also operate under the policies adopted by the Georgia School Board. These policies are available for you to review in the school's main office and include no smoking on school grounds and drinking water that has been tested and is free from lead.
- A copy of the School Health Policy, as it pertains to the Early Education Program, is included within this Handbook.
- Parents will be asked to participate in a questionnaire at the end of the year to help in our self-evaluation process.

### **ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES**

1. Contact the school office to request a registration form.
2. Complete the registration form, attach your child's immunization record, birth certificate, residency verification forms and if applicable, any court orders regarding custody and visitation procedures. All documents should be submitted to the main office of the district's elementary school.
3. A placement letter will be sent once enrollment is confirmed.
4. Permission forms (medication, transportation, field trips, picture day, volunteer opportunities, emergency medical attention...) will be reviewed and signed at family visits. .

### **PARENT ACCESS**

Parents can access our program and their children at any time without prior notice. Each child's documents will be maintained for 365 days after a child's last day of enrollment or

attendance. Each child's documents will be made available to a child's parents within 5 days of the request.

### **PICK-UP AUTHORIZATION**

Only those listed on your pick up authorization form will be allowed to pick up your child from preschool. **We must be informed in writing each time your child is to be picked up by someone other than a parent or person listed on the registration form.** When this is to occur, please remind the individual picking up your child that he/she must have proper identification (e.g. driver's license) for us to release your child to him/her.

\*\*Each person dropping off and picking up children will be documented on our attendance forms.

### **EMERGENCY PLAN**

Our preschool program follows the same Emergency Response Plan of our elementary school for a range of emergencies, both natural and man made, including evacuation drills and Run, Hide, Fight safety drills. Parents are notified of emergencies through our school's messaging system which will inform you of the relocation site if the school should need to evacuate. Teachers maintain an emergency binder that has contact information to maintain the safety and supervision of our children. A complete evacuation plan is available for you to review in our school office.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All members of our staff shall maintain confidentiality regarding each child and family enrolled in our program. Information is only shared when parental permission is specifically granted, except to the Child Development Division or other entities with statutory authority for issues relating to the health, safety and protection of children. This includes records, files, videotaping, tape recordings, photographs, assessments or any other type of documentation.

### **CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

All school employees are mandated reporters. Therefore, we are required by state law to report any suspected child abuse or neglect to The Vermont Department of Children and Families (DCF) within 24 hours of an incident. Abuse is defined as a physical injury inflicted by a parent or other person responsible for the child's care by other than accidental means,

or any other treatment, including sexual abuse, which places the child's life, health, development or welfare in jeopardy. Neglect is defined as abandonment or insufficient care of a child by parents, guardians, or other custodians, i.e., lack of proper food, clothing and supervision.

### **HEALTH POLICY**

- **Well Care Exam:** Within 45 days of enrollment a copy of your child's age appropriate well care exam (physical) is needed for his/her file.
- **Immunizations:** All students shall be adequately and appropriately immunized for his/her age in accordance with the Vermont Department of Health recommended schedule. If the child has not been immunized due to a Vermont allowed exemption. A copy of the Vermont Department of Health Exemption form is needed for his/her file.
- **Injured Students:** If we are unable to reach the parent/guardian, the school nurse shall exercise judgment regarding what procedure shall be followed
- **Allergies:** Families with a child identified with life-threatening allergies should contact the school nurse to share medical information and determine what procedures need to be taken. Providing a safe environment for students with life-threatening allergies does not mean an environment guaranteed to be free of the allergen, but one in which precautions have been identified and undertaken to minimize exposure to an identified allergen(s).
- **Illness:** When all efforts to reach a parent/guardian or designated caretaker fail, the sick child shall remain in the nurse's office, under supervision, until time for dismissal.
- **Signs and Symptoms Illness Chart:** Teachers will use the Signs and Symptoms Illness chart to assess whether a preschool student needs to be seen by the school nurse or sent home. The school nurse will determine when a student needs to go home. The chart will help you decide whether or not your child should attend school. If a child is unable to participate in the daily routines of preschool because they don't feel well, then they should stay home.
- **The Signs and Symptoms Chart is in Appendix A of the Child Care Licensing Regulations:**  
<https://outside.vermont.gov/dept/DCF/Shared%20Documents/CDD/Licensin g/CC-CenterBased-Regs.pdf>

- **Administration of medication:**

1. Most medicine can and should be given at home. Parents/guardians should give the first dose of any medication.
2. All medication administered at school will be given by the school nurse.
3. Written permission from parents and the physician is needed to administer medication in school.
4. **Medication should be hand delivered by the parent or guardian to the school's health office.** To ensure your child's well being and the safety of our students, do not send any medication to school via the bus, backpacks or lunch boxes.
5. To administer, medication must include the following for both prescription and non-prescription medicine:
  - Name of child
  - Child's date of birth
  - Any medication allergies
  - Medication must be in its original pharmacy container and properly labeled for the child
  - Name of medication
  - Dosage to be given
  - Time when medication is to be given
  - Route of administration (mouth, ear, nose, topical, inhalation)
  - Reason for the medication
  - Start and end dates for administration of the medication
  - Administered prior to the expiration date on the container
  - Any other special instructions.
6. Unused medication will be returned to the parent when no longer needed by the child.

### **TRANSITION/ORIENTATION**

One of our primary concerns is having your child feel comfortable and happy at school. Therefore, at the beginning of each school year, we schedule private family visits to the preschool classrooms. This gives everyone a chance to ease into the school routine and to ask and answer any questions you may have.

### **VOLUNTEERS**

We will be allowing parent volunteers this year. All volunteers must have a background check and meet the Georgia Elementary School requirements. Please go to the GEMS website for volunteer information and an application. We can and will be creative about ways in which you can participate in our preschool classrooms. The link to the 2023- 2024 Volunteer Form can also be found here:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfmADDNIAx\\_BFURoK5dlqe8dSGql8MFza1rd4wR0srDZU6fNg/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfmADDNIAx_BFURoK5dlqe8dSGql8MFza1rd4wR0srDZU6fNg/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0)

### **BUS REGULATIONS**

The main and overwhelming purpose behind any rules and regulations regarding student behavior on school buses is to provide for the safety of the students. Secondly, the objectives of this policy are to protect the equipment and teach students proper group behavior. Riding on the school bus should be a part of the student's total educational experience, and coordinate with various school activities.

Students are asked to remain in their seats at all times when the bus is in motion and at other times at the direction of the driver. Any behavior which will serve to distract the bus driver is prohibited. This would include, but is not limited to, shouting or making loud noises, throwing objects, hitting or wrestling with other students, and putting any object or part of the body out of the window.

Children will be dropped off at their designated stop **only if the bus driver visually verifies that the parent or caregiver is present.** If this adult is not visible, the child will be brought back to school and the parent or caregiver will be contacted by the office and directed to pick up the child at school.

### **PROCESS FOR SHARING CONCERNS**

1. Parents are encouraged to address all concerns and complaints with their child's teaching staff (Early Education Teacher, Early Childhood Special Educator and Speech/Language Pathologist).
2. If concerns are unresolved after talking with the teaching staff, or if the parent doesn't feel comfortable with talking to the teaching team directly, the parents are encouraged to set a time to meet with the program director and/or school principal.
3. At any time, complaints and concerns can be shared with the Child Care Consumer Line by calling 1-800-649-2642.



4. Parents can access the Center Based Child Care and Preschool Program Regulations which are posted in your child's classroom or by accessing them online at the Vermont Child Development Division website.

<https://outside.vermont.gov/dept/DCF/Shared%20Documents/CDD/Licensing/CC-CenterBased-Regs.pdf>

The school calendar can be found on the GEMS website. Here is the link:

[https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded\\_file/3106/FWSU/2928975/FWSU\\_2023-2024\\_Calendar\\_-\\_2023-2024\\_School\\_Calendar.pdf](https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/3106/FWSU/2928975/FWSU_2023-2024_Calendar_-_2023-2024_School_Calendar.pdf)

The GEMS Student Handbook also has information that parents may want to know. You can find this document here:

[https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded\\_file/3106/GEMS/3436185/GEMS\\_Handbook\\_23-24\\_4.pdf](https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/3106/GEMS/3436185/GEMS_Handbook_23-24_4.pdf)

The last day of preschool is scheduled to be Friday, June 7th. The preschool program ends before the rest of the school so that we can meet and screen the new incoming preschoolers for the 2024-2025 school year.