

**Farmington River Regional
Elementary School
Integrated Preschool Program
Handbook
2022-2023**



Philosophy:

We believe that all young children learn best in a school environment that acknowledges the developmental stages of early development while providing a safe, nurturing setting to ease the transition from home to school.

Mission Statement:

The Farmington River Regional preschool provides innovative services to children and their families through high-quality, integrated classroom programs and collaboration with regional human services agencies. The needs of all children are met through the creation of classroom environments that foster the development of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills. Active exploration of the environment is enhanced by interaction with other children and adults.

Program Description:

Our preschool offers a developmentally appropriate integrated early childhood experience, in accordance with the licensing guidelines provided by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.

Each day, open-ended activities are offered to the children. Staff members take note of children's interests and plan projects that encourage exploration of these interests, documenting the process with developmental checklists, photography and written narrative. Current research in child development shows that all children – those with special needs and their peers – benefit from these activities, gaining the best preparation for future schooling. In our program, special emphasis is placed on stories, songs, and poems that encourage language development. These skills, as well as experience in the other curriculum areas (math, science, and social studies) along with the development of gross and fine motor areas, are primary tools for building future school success.

Our preschool program uses math and literacy materials that align with state standards and the literacy and math Reading Streets curriculum (OWL, Opening to the World of Learning, for preschool) used in pre-k through grade 6.

Goals:

Our preschool strives to:

- Make school a positive, fun experience which fosters respect and trust among children and adults
- Develop children's self-esteem, a sense of competence, and positive feelings toward learning
- Establish a foundation for life-long learning
- Facilitate the child's acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as the inclination to use them
- Encourage independence, risk-taking, responsibility, and decision-making abilities in each child
- Encourage children to think, question, and experiment
- Create an environment that accepts and challenges children with a variety of approaches appropriate to their level of development
- Respect and appreciate cultural, family, and economic diversity as well as individual differences among children
- Encourage language development, a love of books, and an eagerness to read and write in place of dependence on television, videos, and video games
- Develop social skills such as cooperation, negotiation, and interpersonal relationships with peers and adults
- Enhance physical development
- Encourage sound health, safety, and nutritional practices
- Encourage creative expression of ideas and feelings through a variety of artistic media
- Encourage family participation in the child's school experience
- Provide a smooth transition to kindergarten by fostering collaboration among preschool and kindergarten staff and families

Statement of Inclusion and Non-Discrimination:

The Farmington River Regional School District and its preschool program prohibit discrimination in all classrooms. No child is excluded from an activity, service, or resource available in the school on account of race, cultural heritage, religion, national origin, political beliefs, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation of parent(s) or guardian(s). Students with needs have their individual programs developed with input from parents, guardians, teachers, specialists, and administrators. Services are delivered in the classroom whenever feasible. Children with needs have priority in the preschool enrollment process.

Behavior Management Policy:

The purpose of each and every child/adult interaction, including discipline, is to promote the child's self-esteem and self-control. An atmosphere of respect for the children is maintained at all times. Each situation calling for intervention by an adult is seen as an opportunity to help the child increase his/her skills in cooperation and negotiation.

Adults in the classroom use positive guidance techniques, such as:

- *Modeling* appropriate behavior: The staff is cooperative and courteous, using "please" and "thank you."
- *Redirection* of a child's inappropriate behavior: "Blocks are for building" to the child who is using them aggressively; "It's time to choose a table activity" to a child who is running.
- *Positive reinforcement*: "You have built an interesting block tower!" to the child who has responded well to redirection.

Children are involved in establishing *simple rules for social living* such as "...in school, we use gentle hands and helping words." When inappropriate behavior arises, the children are encouraged to problem-solve as the adult suggests, "Can you think of a way to share that toy?"

Limits are set clearly and calmly to provide for the children's safety at all times. Verbal or physical abuse, humiliation, sarcasm, or denials of activities are not used as punishment. Criticism, competition, and comparison with peers are not used to enforce the rules. Children are not punished for soiling, wetting, or not using the toilet.

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting System:

Section 51A, Chapter 119 of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts stipulates that all school personnel are identified mandated reporters who are required to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to the district Superintendent or designee and through her/him to the Massachusetts Department of Social Services.

Enrollment Information:

Farmington River's Preschool Program offers enrollment on a priority basis. Children with identified needs or those considered at risk for social or economic reasons receive priority. Other residents of Sandisfield and Otis are given preference for remaining slots; non-residents may also be admitted on a space-available basis.

Group Assignment:

Our preschool is a half-day program for preschoolers ages 3-4. Our classroom is equipped with age-appropriate materials and schedules reflect time for play as well as opportunities for group time and outdoor play. The preschool hours are 8:30-11:30 am.

PROGRAM PARTICULARS

Services:

Our preschool provides programming for 3 and 4-year old children. Preschool operates according to the Farmington River school calendar. Children who are 3 years old before September 1st are eligible to attend. Children with identified special needs may enter the program any time after their third birthday if indicated as part of their Individual Education Plan (IEP) (see below).

Before entering preschool, children are screened by the school staff to identify possible special needs. Following state law, we provide similar screening if the parent/guardian has concerns about his/her development even if the child is not registered for preschool. Parents will be notified in writing of the screening results.

Services for our children with needs are developed, with parent or guardians' input, through an *Individual Education Plan* (IEP). A team of specialists, which may include the teacher, assistants, school nurse, social worker, speech therapist, occupational or physical therapist, and the director of student services work with the parents to create the IEP. The classroom teacher, assistants, and appropriate specialists will implement and evaluate the IEP objectives. The team will meet periodically to discuss the child's progress with the parent and revise the IEP if necessary. The parent will have open communication with the teacher and specialists and may request conferences with them at any time.

Preschoolers with needs, who have been identified and screened by the school staff are integrated into the group and may receive services such as speech, physical, and/or occupational therapy within or separate from the classroom, as agreed upon by the team. Children with needs share their school experience with peers without needs.

Preschool staff documents the progress of all children throughout the year. If concerns about any child's development should arise at any time, the teacher will meet with the parents to recommend further evaluation and possible services as described above.

Any major changes that affect preschool children are discussed with families before decisions are made.

Meeting the Needs of All Children:

Our principal, teachers and their assistants, and all other professionals working with our children are trained to provide positive and consistent guidance to children based on their needs and level of development. Plans to ensure that this happens includes our screening process, frequent written and verbal communication with families, documentation of children's development through portfolios, on-going consultation among preschool staff and school specialists to review children's progress, and individual parent conferences in the fall. It is also important that parents/guardians share with us information about their children's development, preferences and habits, and to keep staff updated about significant changes their children's lives. We appreciate families' sharing with us any information about any other therapeutic, educational, social, and support services received by the child, other than those provided through our program. All information is kept in the strictest confidence.

Staff:

In addition to our certified teachers and their assistants, Farmington River Regional Preschool depends on the services of the following:

- **Director of Student Services:** Michael Saporito is the administrator responsible for overseeing all services provided for children with needs in our district. He organizes and leads team meetings and processes the paper work involved in obtaining the services described above. Mr. Saporito also consults with preschool staff concerning child development and behavior.

- **Special Education Teacher:** Jonina Decker is the special education teacher who works with students with special needs in our program. She also conducts preschool screening and assessments. Mrs. Decker consults with staff and parents of students who have an IEP.
- **Guidance:** Our preschool program team includes Terri DiGrigoli, our school adjustment counselor, who is available to provide consults and observations of students when needed. Ms. Terri's guidance services are available to all students, grades PreK-6, and parents can contact her for developmental behavioral advice and assistance.
- **Health:** Our school nurse, Grace Terry (Mrs. Grace), is present in school every day. Mrs. Grace and all preschool teachers and assistants are also certified in CPR and First Aid for young children. She provides hearing and vision screening when children enter the program and as follow up if necessary. Mrs. Grace is also available to train preschool staff about health issues, including nutrition, allergies, sanitation, and background information about childhood illnesses specific to enrolled children. (See more specific information under "**Health Care**" below.)
- **Therapists:** Our speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist, and physical therapist are all experienced professionals who provide services to children who have an IEP requiring them. They are also available to consult with preschool staff regarding children's typical development in these areas and how to foster their development through classroom activities.

OTHER PROGRAM PARTICULARS

Your family's introduction to preschool: A visiting day is held just before the opening of school to review our program particulars.

Assessments of Children:

Children in preschool are assessed **informally** and **formally**.

- **Formal assessments** are the preschool and kindergarten screenings, which obtain information on all areas of development, including cognitive skills, language, social/emotional development, small and large motor development, and health, vision and hearing. If screenings, by parent request or teacher observation, deem it necessary, further **evaluations** may be scheduled. Evaluations are formal assessments designed for their specific purpose (e.g., speech development). They are conducted by trained staff members in the child's language, and are normed and standardized. Our special education staff selects specific evaluation tools for this purpose. Formal assessments take place with family approval and results are provided to the family. These results are held in confidence. Parents may request information about formal assessment tools used for their children. Another formal assessment used at preschool is the Work Sampling System, described below.
- **Informal assessments** include the information we gather about children on an on-going basis as we observe them in the classroom setting. We enjoy watching the children gain confidence in literacy, math, and social skills as well as their accomplishments in early writing, creating, and playground excursion. Informal assessments are also shared with families during family conferences or at any time you or your child's teacher may request. All forms of assessments help classroom teachers learn more about children's strengths, interests, and needs so that they may better plan curriculum and daily activities for the group and for individual children. Your role in assessment is important. We depend on your input regarding your child's abilities, interests, and needs. You will be asked for input during our individual conferences and by filling out questionnaires at enrollment.

Your Child's School Progress:

Preschool staff uses anecdotal notes and observations to record and evaluate your child's school progress in all areas. The records will be shared with you during your individual conferences, scheduled in late fall. Written progress reports will be sent home in January and again in June. Other more informal indicators of your child's school experience are collected in a portfolio of photographs, drawings, and dictations of your child's stories and

observations. Artwork and photographs of the children are frequently posted in the classrooms and on the large bulletin board in the hallway.

Communication with Families:

The school will make every effort to provide communication with families in the language they use and understand. As your child's parent, you are the best source of information about him/her. We depend on background information as well as your specific ideas about your child; please feel free to discuss your child's life outside of school with us. You can share information and background about your child by:

- Including pertinent information on the parent interview form and the school health form provided during each year's registration process.
- Putting information in writing to be included in your child's confidential file.
- Sharing ideas and information with your child's teacher during a home visit, or informally by phone, note, or at pick up and drop off time.
- Requesting a meeting – at any point in the year – with your child's teacher to talk about any aspect of your family or child's background, school progress, or other issues.
- We also appreciate information about your family's ethnic background, cultural heritage, special interests and talents. If you are interested in sharing what is unique to your family with the class, please speak to us!

Brief newsletters are sent home every month to inform parents of special events and activities, and to share the daily classroom routines. Please read these carefully since they often contain information that may require additional planning or a change in our regular schedule.

We depend on *your* input concerning our program:

- If you have specific concerns about your child, please speak with his/her teacher immediately
- If your concerns are about the program and/or other services, you may contact Principal/Superintendent Robert Putnam

Children's Records:

The school nurse maintains health records; children receiving special education services have records maintained by the director of student services. All records are considered confidential. If your child leaves the program, please ask to arrange for copies of your child's records.

Confidentiality:

Sensitive information about your child, his/her progress in school, family members, and tuition/income information will be held in strictest confidence by our teachers, assistants, coordinators, guidance personnel, and specialists. Information in a child's record is not released to individuals not directly related to implementing the child's program without consent of the child's parent(s) or guardian(s). Parents or guardians, upon request, will have access to children's records within two workdays of the request. The Department of Education regulation 603 CMR 23.00 outlines regulations on confidentiality of records.

Health Care:

Grace Terry, our school nurse, is on duty from 8:30 – 3:00 each school day. The nurse and each preschool staff member are trained in First Aid and CPR for young children. The school nurse and/or the teachers may administer first aid in routine situations. In more serious cases, the ambulance squad may be called. The "First Aid and Emergency Medical Care Consent Form" that you will fill out at the beginning of the school year provides us with the information we need to contact you, and gives us permission to transport a child to the hospital if we are unable to reach you.

State regulations require that all preschoolers have a record of updated immunizations and proof of an updated (within one calendar year) physical exam in their student file upon enrollment. You will be asked to update this information every 12 months until kindergarten entry. Please note that if, after three requests, the school is not provided with updated health information, your child cannot attend preschool until said records have been received.

Your child's health is a matter of concern to all of us. If we observe changes in your child's physical or emotional state, we will bring it to your attention immediately. It is also helpful to us if you keep us informed of similar changes noted at home. If your child becomes ill at school, we reserve the right to isolate your child from the class (supervised in the nurse's office, for example) and notify you.

The following are common contagious conditions among school children and are considered to be communicable or contagious conditions. Health Department Regulations require that a child be excluded from school for the following conditions...

- **Head lice/nits:** students may return after treated. The nurse will check child's head prior to entry.
- **Influenza and febrile illnesses:** students must be fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications
- **Conjunctivitis:** students may return to school 24 hours after the antibiotic medication has been administered
- **Strep infection:** students may return to school 24 hours after the antibiotic medication has been administered
- **If the student has a fever of 100 degrees or higher, or is vomiting or has diarrhea,** he/she must remain out of school 24 hours after all symptoms have subsided

By following these guidelines, your child will be more comfortable and other children, and staff, will be spared possible exposure to communicable diseases.

Mrs. Grace will inform all staff about individual children's allergies or other conditions requiring special attention. This information is held in confidence by staff.

To protect children and adults in our school, our staff has been trained to follow universal precautions for blood-borne pathogens.

Medications Policy:

All medications must be turned in to the nurse's office. In the event medication must be given during school hours, a parent/guardian and physician must sign a medication permission form which must be on file in the nurse's office. Any prescribed medication will be dispensed only when accompanied by written permission from a parent and with the child's attending physician's order. The medication must be in the original container which is clearly labeled with the following:

- Name of student
- Date of prescription
- Name of the medication and dosage
- Name of the prescribing physician
- Number of times the medication is to be given
- All medications orders must be renewed at the beginning of each year.
- For short-term medications, such as antibiotics, the prescription label may be used as the doctor's order.

The school nurse or her designee will be the only person who administers medications at school. Please contact Mrs. Grace for more information regarding the distribution of medication or if you have specific questions.

Meeting other Potential Emergencies:

Farmington River Elementary School has a *Crisis Management Plan* outlining emergency procedures. In addition, each classroom and space used by children and staff contains posted information about fire procedures; preschoolers practice this monthly (some with the alarm, some "quiet").

Snacks:

The Farmington River Elementary School cafeteria provides snacks to our program every day. These are healthy, well-balanced snacks according to the state nutrition guidelines.

Parent Teacher Association

Farmington River Elementary School has an active PTA (Parent Teacher Association) group that plans activities, events for all students, and raises money to support them. We encourage families to take an active role in this organization, and/or serving on the Farmington River Regional School Committee. For more information about any of these, please see your child's teacher.

What to wear?

When dressing your child for preschool, think of comfort. Provide simple clothing that is free of complicated fasteners. Children gain a sense of competence when they are successful at handling their own clothing, especially when toileting and dressing to go outdoors.

In addition, consider outdoor play, messy art materials, and playing on the floor. Clothing that is sturdy, washable, and comfortable, rubber-soled shoes that stay securely on little feet and outer clothing suitable for the weather will make your child's school day easier. We go outdoors daily, weather permitting. In winter, your child will need snow pants, a warm jacket, boots, a hat, and mittens. It will be helpful to us if you continue to encourage your child to dress himself/herself at home.

For safety reasons, please provide sturdy shoes, sneakers, or sandals with backs rather than slip-on shoes for outdoor play. Crocs and flip-flops are not safe on the playground equipment. In warmer weather, we recommend socks with sandals to prevent wood chip discomfort. You may leave sneakers in your child's cubby and we will change his/her shoes for outdoor time and gym.

Plan to keep a full set of extra clothes (socks, underwear, shirt, and pants) in the plastic box above your child's coat cubby or in your child's backpack and brought to school each day. Make sure that each article of clothing is labeled with your child's name. If your child uses his/her second set of clothing please make sure that a replacement set is sent the next day. Extra clothes should be changed according to the change in seasons. Also, children grow so much during the year—please check your child's box periodically, or ask a teacher to make sure that their extra clothes still fit.

Dropping off and picking up your child:

All preschool students will be dropped off and picked up through the preschool door located near the preschool playground. Parents/guardians dropping off and/or picking up their child should park in one of the two parking lots and not in the bus lanes in front of the school.

School begins promptly at 8:30 am. Please use the side preschool entrance (located near the playground). Per safety regulations, the door remains locked at all times and parents are not allowed inside the building. Please ring the doorbell when you arrive and a staff member will meet you at the door to escort your child into their classroom. Please keep in mind, children will not be allowed into the building until the bell rings at 8:30.

Dismissal time will be 11:30. It is important to remember to pick your child up **promptly** at the session's end. Our staff's schedules do not provide for extended supervision of children. More importantly, however, it may be upsetting for children to see classmates leave while they wait. We understand that there are unforeseen complications; please call the school if you will be late picking up your child. If someone unfamiliar to the staff is picking your child up from school, please let us know in advance. Such people should be prepared to show us picture identification (driver's license).

Attendance and Schedules:

Written attendance records are kept daily to account for all children, present and absent. Regular attendance at preschool is a good preparation for consistent school attendance in the upper grades. Regular attendance is a critical part of your child's adjustment to school, so we urge you to make every reasonable effort to have your child attend each day of his/her weekly schedule. Our program is ongoing and follows a cohesive plan. Frequent absences can be confusing to a child and make separation from home more difficult. Please call the school to let us know if your child will not be attending school on any given day. You can leave a message with the office staff or ask to be connected to your child's teacher.

The preschool program follows the Farmington River Regional school calendar with regard to school vacations and holidays. You will be notified of any changes. Please note that this calendar does not indicate that some preschoolers may not attend every day or that our beginning schedule is different from that of the K-6 classes.

Weather Cancellations and Delays:

If school is cancelled because of snow, preschool is also cancelled. In the event of a 2-hour delay, there will be no preschool.

Field Trips:

Occasionally, your child's class may go on a field trip. You will be given a permission slip to sign and return. We also depend on parent volunteers to drive/chaperone our field trips. The field trips are designed to be fun for both children and families, therefore we strongly encourage families to attend. In case of an emergency on a trip, staff will always have the children's emergency information as well as a cell phone and a first aid kit. There is no charge for preschool field trips.

Toys from home:

We ask that you leave your child's toys or other treasures at home. It is difficult for young children to share a special item with so many others, and we cannot be responsible for items that may find their way to school. If your child has a favorite book to share with the group, we will enjoy reading it. If you or your child has some special item relevant to our classroom theme, we will be happy to make plans to share it with the class.

IN CONCLUSION...

We want to make sure that your child's first school experience is a positive one. Our program has been designed to offer appropriate activities for children while providing resources and support for parents. If you have any concerns at all – whether they are about your child's adjustment to school, a family issue affecting your child, or a concern about our program – please speak to your child's teacher, who can help work out the best line of communication.

Important contact information:

Rebecca Hamill (classroom teacher): 413-269-4466 ext. 127
rhamill@frsd.org

Robert Putnam (interim principal/superintendent) 413-269-4466 ext. 203
rputnam@frsd.org

Michael Saporito (director of student services) 413-269-4466 ext. 139
msaporito@frsd.org

Grace Terry (nurse) 413-26-4466 ext. 146
gterry@frsd.org

*Contact information for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Department of Early Education and Care:
51 Sleeper Street Boston, MA02210 Phone: (617) 988-2451. The Department's website can be reached through
www.mass.gov*

Other websites you might find useful:

- *www.frsd.org: Farmington River Elementary's website where you can find many helpful information, including the district calendar, monthly lunch menus, classroom websites, etc.*
- *www.southberkshirekids.org: The website for the Consolidated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) Executive Council. The website offers information about services, programs and activities for young children and their families in southern Berkshire County.*

This handbook contains important information regarding our program. This handbook is revised each year to reflect changes in staff, policy, and programming.