



Early Explorations Preschool
Parent Handbook 2022-2023

Contents

1. Welcome Letter	2
2. Mission Statement	3
3. Program Goals/Curriculum	5
Early Explorations Preschool	
Voluntary Prekindergarten Program	
4. Program Calendar	6-7
Program Hours and Holidays	
5. Policies and Procedures	8
Potty Training	
Biting	
Discipline	
Pick-Up/Drop-Off	
Late Pick-Up	
Emergency Closing Procedures	
6. Parent Responsibilities	10
Parent Participation	
Communication	
Appropriate Attire	
Guidelines for Meals	
Financial	
7. Medical	12
Illness	
Medication	
Injuries at School	
8. Additional Information	14
Getting Used to Preschool	
Fundraising	
Birthdays/Holidays	
Outside Toys	
T.V. and Computer Policy	
Interns	
Licensing and Inspection	
9. Employee Directory	17
Our Staff	

1. Welcome Letter



Welcome!

We are very excited that you have chosen Early Explorations Preschool to be a vital role in your child's early years of exploration and development. Our most important priority is your child, and we strive to create an atmosphere to aide in the cognitive, language, physical and creative skills that your child will develop each day. We make every effort to assure that these goals are met, from our well-developed curriculum to our highly qualified and well-trained staff.

Our commitment to you and your child is to provide a safe, loving, and nurturing environment where you feel comfortable leaving your child. This parent handbook will provide you with essential information about our policies and day to day operations. Please keep it among your important papers and use it often as a source of reference.

Here at Early Explorations Preschool, we believe the first years of a child's life are meant to be gratifying and filled with feelings of accomplishment. I would like to thank you for letting us be a part of your child's life and look forward to working together with you for many years.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Chel Personius
Director of Educational Programs
cpersonius@greatex.org
727-821-8992 EXT 219

2.

Mission Statement

The mission of Early Explorations Preschool, as a nonprofit educational and cultural resource, is to ensure that each student experiences the joy of learning through creativity, play and exploration.

We aspire to make learning fun while maintaining values of safety and trust.

3. Program Goals and Curriculum

Early Explorations Preschool at Great Explorations provides the highest quality of childcare and education in a secure, nurturing, and stimulating environment. We provide low teacher-child ratios in every classroom and highly qualified teachers.

The Early Explorations Preschool believes all students have their own specific learning styles, interests and experiences they bring to the classroom. Our early learning program offers a child-centered curriculum that is generated from the interests of the students and their surrounding environment.

To ensure that we are running a quality educational program we conduct developmentally appropriate assessments on every child throughout the year. This helps the teachers to gather information in order to make informed instructional decisions, i.e., curriculum, learning activities, and classroom projects.

Our goal is to foster a love of learning in a positive environment where social and emotional needs are met every day as physical and cognitive skills are developed. We facilitate this positive environment by combining the following educational methods:

- **Early Learning Curriculum**

We implement the **Creative Curriculum for Preschool**, fourth edition. This developmentally appropriate program focuses on social, emotional, physical, cognitive and language development. These central development areas create the framework for both teacher-directed and child-directed learning. In response to the students' unique learning styles, strengths and interests, teachers will address content in literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts and technology.

- **VPK Program Overview**

According to the Early Learning Coalition, research shows that children that complete high quality prekindergarten programs enter school prepared to learn. Based on Florida Department of Education's Voluntary Prekindergarten Readiness Rates, children that completed VPK programs also scored higher on the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS), meaning they were more prepared when entering Kindergarten. Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Program is designed to prepare four-year olds for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. All children who turn 4 years old on or before September 1st are eligible to attend a VPK program. This program ensures that children are intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially ready to enter school. VPK focuses on reading, writing, and social skills. The Florida Center for Reading Research has developed the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Assessment. The purpose of this assessment is to provide teachers with valid and reliable feedback, so that the teachers may use this information to guide instructional decisions in the VPK classroom.

The VPK Assessment includes monitoring in areas of Print Knowledge, Phonological Awareness, Mathematics, and Oral Language/Vocabulary that are aligned with the Standards for Four-Year Olds. These assessments are administered three times in the VPK year. Parent/teacher conferences are available after each assessment period.

These Assessments are as follows (*required)

- **Assessment Period 1 – the month of September***
- **Assessment Period 2 – the month of January**
- **Assessment Period 3 – the month of April/May (end of program year) ***

4. Program Calendar

2022-2023 Early Explorations Preschool Calendar

Date	Weekday	Event
July 4th, 2022	Monday	SCHOOL CLOSED FOR JULY 4TH OBSERVANCE
August 8 th & 9 th	Monday & Tuesday	Professional In-Service Day (School Closed)
August 10 th	Wednesday	First Day of Preschool, VPK & Stay & Play
September 5 th	Monday	Labor Day (school closed)
October 17 th	Monday	Professional In-Service Day (School Closed)
November 21 st – 25 th	Monday-Friday	Thanksgiving Break (School Closed)
December 23 rd – 30 th	Friday-Friday	Christmas Break (School Closed)
January 2 nd - 6 th 2023	Monday-Friday	New Year's Eve/Day Break (School Closed)
January 16 th 2023	Monday	Martin Luther King, Jr Day (School Closed)
April 7 th 2023	Friday	Professional In-Service Day (School Closed)
May 12 th 2023	Friday	Professional In-Service Day (School Closed)
May 25 th 2023	Thursday	Last Day of VPK/ Graduation
May 26 th 2023	Friday	Professional In-Service Day (School Closed)
May 29 th 2023	Monday	Memorial Day (School Closed)

Program Hours and Holidays

Early Explorations is open Monday through Friday throughout the calendar year from 7:30am-5:30pm. We are unable to accept children before 7:30am, **we require all children to be signed in by 9 am**, and we promptly close at 5:30pm. Parent's dropping off late will be required to sign a late book and not allowed to drop off late a second time. Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) hours are from 9:00am-12:00pm.

Early Explorations Preschool is closed for the following days:

- New Year's Eve/ Day
- Martin Luther King Day
- Professional In-service Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Break
- Christmas Break

5. Policies and Procedures

Potty Training

All children must be potty-trained by 3 years old to transition into the 3-year-old class. Fully potty-trained includes not wearing a diaper or pull-up even during nap as well as being able to wipe themselves.

A child will not receive the 3-year-old tuition rate until they are fully potty-trained. Children must be fully potty-trained by 3 ½ to maintain a spot in the preschool. No child older than 3 ½ is permitted to stay in a 2-year-old class.

Biting

-If a child bites 3 times in one day-they are to be sent home. If the third bite of the day occurs in the afternoon, after 3pm, the child will be sent home for the remainder of the day, as well as the next school day.

-If the first bite breaks the skin, causing the child to bleed, the child who bit will be sent home immediately.

Discipline

We are governed by the disciplinary regulations of the Pinellas County License Board for Children's Centers. These regulations state:

Children's centers must ensure that age appropriate, constructive disciplinary practices are used for children in care. No child will be subjected to discipline which is severe, humiliating or frightening, or associated with food, rest or toileting. Spanking or any other form of physical punishment is prohibited.

Our discipline policy models the practice of "social learning through guidance." Our teachers use student behaviors as opportunities to demonstrate constructive and effective ways of working through egocentric development. Our goal is to teach personal responsibility through conflict resolution and foster the students' emerging inner control mechanisms. Some of our methods are as follows:

- Modeling appropriate behavior and language through example
- Reciprocal teacher / student communication in developmentally appropriate language
- Redirecting children to more developmentally appropriate activities
- Repeatedly setting clear limits for inappropriate or unsafe behavior

- Other techniques to be used would be: planned ignoring, signal interference, proximity control, and/or interest boosting.

If these measures prove ineffective, a parent is notified and brought in for a conference at the discretion of the director and teachers.

The Early Explorations Preschool program reserves the right to withdraw a student should extreme negative behaviors occur or should the school determine that the environment is not appropriate for a student.

If a student has three write-ups/incident reports for negative behavior Early Explorations Preschool reserves the right to terminate care for that student.

Expulsion Policy

While never an easy decision, there are some circumstances that warrant expelling a child from our program; either on a short term or permanent basis. We want you to know that we will do everything possible to work with the family of the child in order to prevent this policy from being enforced. The following are reasons we may have to expel or suspend a child from this center:

Immediate Causes for Expulsion:

- The child is at risk of causing serious injury to other children or themselves.
- Parent threatens physical or intimidating actions towards staff members.
- Parent exhibits verbal abuse to staff in front of enrolled children.

Parental Actions for Child's Expulsion:

- Failure to pay habitual lateness in payments.
- Failure to complete required forms including the child's immunization records.
- Habitual tardiness when picking up your child.

Child's actions for child's Expulsion:

- Failure of child to adjust after a reasonable amount of time. (2 weeks)
- Uncontrollable tantrums/angry outbursts.
- Ongoing physical or verbal abuse to staff or other children.
- Excessive biting. (See biting policy)

Prior to expulsion, a parent will be called and correspondence will be sent home indicating what the problem is, and every effort will be made by both the center and the parent to correct the problem. If, after one or two weeks, depending on the risk to the other children's welfare or safety, behavior does not improve, and the center finds that

they can no longer accommodate the child, the parent will be asked to remove the child. The parent will be given a minimum of one weeks' notice to find another center to provide care for this child.

Drop-Off/Pick-Up

Please sign your child **in** and **out** with **full signature, no initials**, when dropping them off or picking them up in the classroom/museum. We require all children to be signed in by 9 am, and we promptly close at 5:30 pm **If your child arrives after 9:00 they will be turned away for that day, with the exception of a child that has been to a doctor's appointment. A child must have a note from the doctor/dentist to return to school If your child is going to be absent from school for a day or an extended vacation, please send an email to Ms. Chel and Ms. Emily stating the date, how long the child will be absent and the reason for the child's absence.**

Absences may not be relayed through ClassDojo.

Please make direct verbal contact with the teacher to ensure that he or she knows when your student is arriving or departing. Please also have a **photo ID** on hand. Early Explorations Preschool will not release a child to someone who appears intoxicated or impaired. Another adult from the contact list will be called to have the child picked up. If pick up is after **5:30pm a late fee will occur.**

Late Pick-Up

The **Early Explorations Preschool** closes promptly at **5:30pm**. Please plan to pick up your child by the contracted times. Parents should contact the preschool cell phone at (727)253-7356 to alert staff that they are running late. Families picking up children after their contracted time will incur a minimum fee of \$5 per minute per child. This fee will be applied to your account in Smartcare. **Late pick-up fees must be paid prior to the next month's billing.**

After three late pick-ups your child is subject to suspension for the following school day. Parents will need to sign the late book upon arrival for pick up.

Emergency Closing Procedures

In the case of severe inclement weather (hurricane, etc.) school closings may be required. In the event that Great Explorations closes due to emergency, school staff will make every effort to contact each family individually. In addition, museum staff will contact local media (television and radio) to announce the school's closing and will announce the closing on the school auto attendant, **(727) 821-8992 ext. 219.**

In the unlikely event that emergency personnel require evacuation of the museum, the children will be relocated to our “safe place”—**Outback Steakhouse**, located directly across the street from the museum. A sign will be posted on the doors of the museum and school staff will contact parents using the school cell phone **(727) 253-7356**

6. Parent Responsibilities

Parent Participation

Parents are encouraged to volunteer in our classrooms and contribute to our curriculum. There are many options for participation. Please contact the director to discuss ways you can help.

All classroom volunteers go through a local and Level 2 background check. If a volunteer is in a classroom more than 10 hours a month, they will need to go through a Level 2 background check at their own cost. Any volunteer in a classroom over 40 hours a month must go through the appropriate preschool training at their own cost.

Although we do have an open-door policy, please remember that during class time, all disciplinary matters remain the responsibility of the teaching staff, even if a family member is volunteering that day. Due to our strict licensing standards, we cannot permit family members, including parents, to be left alone with the class or any students during class time.

Communication

Parents are strongly encouraged to participate in active communication with their child’s teacher. Parent/teacher communication will go home each day with your child in a teacher-parent communication app called ClassDojo. This will inform you about your child’s day and help parents/ teachers meet the goals and expectations for each child. We ask that if your child has an IEP or any special needs that you have an open line of communication with the center.

We strive to provide exceptional communication and in doing so bi-weekly updates will be sent via newsletter. It is the parent’s responsibility to keep your email address current with us in order to stay informed. If your email changes, please be sure to notify us.

Please feel free to speak with any of our staff members, the Director or Assistant Director about any questions or concerns you have with our program.

Appropriate Attire

As a part of our curriculum, we will have students participate in art projects that involve paint and other materials that could potentially damage clothing. We will make every attempt to prevent damage to your child’s clothing, but Great Explorations cannot accept responsibility for any damaged clothing. We recommend that you send your child in play clothes that you will not mind possibly being damaged. **Also closed-toed, rubber-soled**

shoes or dress shoes should be worn to ensure the safety of all students, crocks are okay. Please NO sandals or Flip Flops

All students should bring a change of clothes; those who are potty training should bring two. A change of clothes should include top, bottom, underwear, and socks. Great Explorations cannot provide clothing for students, and we do not have cleaning facilities on the premises. All soiled clothing will be sent home with the student.

Guideline for Meals

Early Explorations Preschool **does not provide meals or snacks**. Each child must pack a lunch and two snacks along with drinks for the whole day. Each snack must include at least two items from different food groups in the food pyramid and lunches must include at least three different food groups. If you need ideas, the preschool staff is willing to help. Please note that our entire school is a **NUT FREE FACILITY**.

Financial

Notice of Withdrawal

If a family wishes to withdraw from the **Early Explorations Preschool** program, we require that a written notice be delivered to the Director of the school **two weeks prior to the withdrawal**. Should a family withdraw without giving the required two weeks' notice, the Director will attempt to fill the vacant slot. If the vacant slot cannot be filled within two weeks the family will be charged for the two weeks, in lieu of notice.

Payments

Initial payments for **Early Explorations Preschool** registration can be made by check, money order, or credit card prior to the first day of care. Our center uses Smartcare, an online system designed to make paying tuition as easy as possible. By establishing a Smartcare account during enrollment, you are able to review your bill and process payments via Debit Card, Credit Card or Checking Account via Parent App or Parent Web Portal. **Note:** there is an additional 2.85% charge for Credit Card payments, but the option of linking your bank account or writing a check is no additional cost to you. There is a check drop box located on the museum floor near our entrance/exit.

The payment schedule is based on 12 equal monthly payments so that payments will not be altered based on the number of days in each month. Tuition will not be prorated for any type of illness, vacation, holidays, or other absences. However, if a child should start during the middle of the month, the child's tuition will be prorated for that first month and then the regular tuition payments will be started the following month.

Museum Membership

Early Explorations Preschool is a member's only program. We require that each family that attends the Preschool have a current and active membership to Great Explorations Children's Museum.

You can find more information about the different types of memberships offered by going to our website www.greatex.org.

7. Medical

All students must have current vaccine & physical records on file. Some students in the center do have a medical exemption.

Illness Policy

We reserve the right to turn child away without a fever if they exhibit any symptoms or contagious illness.

We understand that children occasionally get sick and that your child's illness is understandably a matter of great concern. However, if your child exhibits symptoms of short-term, contagious diseases that can be transmitted through casual contact, please keep your child at home or remove your child from the school as soon as possible. These symptoms consist of the following:

1. A temperature over 101 degrees (with ear thermometer) accompanied by:
 - a. A cough
 - b. An earache or a draining ear
 - c. Sore throat
 - d. Lethargic behavior
 - e. Excessive runny nose/ congestion
2. Diarrhea or vomiting within the last 24 hours.
3. Conjunctivitis, or *Pinkeye*, indicated by redness, burning and a thick discharge. The child will be excluded from school until symptom free. Even if the child is on prescription drops, the child cannot attend school as long as he/she are exhibiting symptoms, as the drops are only effective for the bacterial type infection.
4. Croup-like cough or cough accompanied by rapid or restricted breathing or wheezing.

5. Runny nose with clear discharge which has just begun. The child will be excluded for two days, because this is when a cold is contagious or may be an early sign of measles or chicken pox.
6. Rashes that the parent cannot identify or that have not been diagnosed by a physician.
7. Contagious diseases. Some of these include: measles, chicken pox, mumps, roseola, etc. If a doctor diagnoses an infection and places the child on an antibiotic, the child should remain home until they have been on the medication for at least 24 hours.
8. Lice or nits in hair. The child must be completely clear of both prior to re-entry.

The director will call you if it seems that your child is developing a health problem. We hope that such early communication can facilitate the resolution of health problems as they occur and thereby prevent the spread of illness. In order to ensure the safety of all the students, please keep your child out of school for 24 hours, and the entire next school day, following the last incident of illness. (i.e. If your child is sent home at 11am on a Tuesday with a symptom, please keep him or her home the entire next school day, and they may return on Thursday by 9am, provided they are symptom free) Children who are sent home must be fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) prior to re-entry. While we do our best to ensure the health and safety of all of our students, please remember that in a group setting children often contract illnesses.

Medication

Medication will be dispensed only with physician and parent authorization. Great Explorations will administer oral medication to students in cases of chronic conditions or if the medication is prescribed by a physician and must be administered during school hours. This includes **bug spray, sun screen, diaper cream and vitamins and vitamin gummies.**

Prescription drugs will be dispensed by administrators only if a medical authorization is signed by the parent(s) and if the medicine is in the original container with the prescription label.

Injections and over-the-counter medication cannot be administered by our staff.

ALL MEDICATION MUST BE LEFT IN THE OFFICE with the Director or Manager on Duty and must be taken home daily (except for epi-pens for allergies and asthma inhalers). Classroom teachers are **NOT** allowed to administer any medications.

Injuries at School

While we take great care in ensuring that our students are safe, children may have accidents. Great Explorations has the following procedures in place in order to ensure your child's safety:

1. Our teachers are First Aid/CPR certified and will provide appropriate assistance to any child who is hurt.
2. An accident report will be filled out for children who have been injured at the center, including any injury that leaves a visible mark or causes the child any discomfort. The original form should be signed by a parent/guardian or whoever picks up the child on that day from the school and a copy will accompany the child home.
3. Head and neck injuries will be reported to you immediately. In most cases, parents will not need to remove the child, but will be informed in case of later symptoms.
4. Should a severe injury occur which requires immediate medical attention the parents and EMS will be contacted. The Director or designee will determine the severity of the injury and contact the appropriate parties.

In case of accidental injury, we will make an immediate attempt to contact a parent/guardian or the child's physician. Depending on the nature and severity of the injury, we will contact you by phone, note, or in person. If your child is injured in our care, our first step is to administer first aid; a first aid kit is available in the office.

Occasionally, two children may have an incident involving hitting or other "rough-housing". The teachers will address the situation and fill out an accident report for both children. Please be aware that rough-housing is a normal part of learning. In order to maintain confidentiality, staff members cannot discuss any child or their behavior with anyone except the child's parent or guardian.

8. Additional Information

Getting Used to Preschool

When your child starts at our school, please remember that meeting new people at a new place can be a stressful situation for anyone. We welcome you to come visit your child, as this will help to make the transition into our school easier for your child as well as the educators.

We recommend that your child bring along a small object that can provide comfort in times of stress. This object could be a small stuffed animal, blanket, or even a family picture. One good idea for younger students who are experiencing a school setting for the first time is to bring an item related to a parent, such as an article of clothing.

A small pillow, fitted infant sheet, and blanket, or nap mat should be brought to school for nap time **and must be taken home and washed every Friday and returned on Monday**. All nap items must fit into a reusable grocery bag. Your child may also be asked to take home personal items to be washed if they or another student is reported ill or is found to have a case of head lice.

Fundraising

As we are a non-profit organization, we may occasionally ask for your support of fundraising events which help supplement our programs. Please feel free to speak with a staff member for information about other ways to show support.

PCLB Food Rules

PCLB rules and regulations state that when children are having a food experience in a lesson plan or there is a special occasion celebration involving food that parents must complete a permission form. It must stay on file for at least 12 months from the date of the activity. All food that is brought into the learning environment must be store bought. Our facility is **NUT FREE**.

Holiday Celebrations

We believe that an important part of the learning process is to explore and accept cultures that are different from our own. In accordance with this belief, we recognize and celebrate all holidays and study their origins and traditions. Family members who wish to share their holiday traditions and heritage are encouraged to contribute to our class curriculum. Please speak with the classroom teacher to discuss specific details about how this can best be accomplished.

Birthday Celebrations

Birthday celebrations are also an important part of our cultural training. Family members are welcome to bring a special treat to celebrate their child's birthday. Unfortunately, we can only allow **store-bought food products in the classroom** because of allergy dangers. Candles and balloons are prohibited because of the potential safety hazard they pose to the students. Parents must notify the child's teacher what they are bringing 48 hours (2 school days) in advance. *i.e.*, If you would like your child's birthday celebration to be on a Tuesday, please notify your child's teacher by the Friday prior.

Outside Toys

We ask that your child not bring toys from home, except for one soft toy for use during naps. A special request may be made by the teachers to bring in an item for show and tell on Fridays. This item may be brought to school for that occasion and then returned home the same day.

T.V. and Computer Policy

Early Explorations Preschool strictly monitors the use of television in the classrooms. A short educational segment may be used in order for children to visually see an example (such as watching how fish swim in a school).

In classrooms with a computer or tablet, a child is allowed 1 minute per the child's age per day of usage. Example: A 2-year-old may watch a 2-minute video, a 3-year-old may watch a 3-minute video, etc....

Interns

As part of our ongoing partnerships with local universities, we may occasionally have college-age interns volunteering in the classrooms. In many instances, interaction with our students may be a part of learning opportunities for these individuals. For the protection of your children, any observations conducted as part of this arrangement cannot include any personal information, including last names, without prior parental consent.

Licensing and Inspections

Our preschool is licensed by the Pinellas County Licensing Board of Children's Centers, which performs inspections three times a year to ensure proper practices. In addition, the Pinellas County fire and health departments conduct annual code and safety inspections. We are committed to operating our school in compliance with all state and county regulations/DCF and ask that you help us by respecting all school rules and regulations. *Our handbook is cultivated to match the rules and regulations of PCLB. If PCLB's policies change, our handbook is subject to change to remain in compliance.

9. Employee Directory

Main phone line: (727) 821-8992

Work Cell Phone: (727) 253-7356

Chel Personius Director of Education	Ext.219	cpersonius@greatex.org
Emily Barnes Assistant Director of Preschool	Ext. 234	ebarnes@greatex.org

Matt Hilts
Assistant Director of School-Age

Ext. 215

mhilts@greatex.org