



GSW PreK

PARENT HANDBOOK

2023-2024

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HANDBOOK

Mission

GSW PreK is committed to providing an exemplary preschool educational program incorporating group and individualized instruction. The program provides effective, developmentally appropriate experiences for all children within the mission of the university.

Program Overview

The educational programming in the PreK is based on the Creative Curriculum in which children are introduced to many experiences that contribute to their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Curriculum is based on a combination of self-selected and teacher-guided educational experiences in the context of whole-group, small-group, and individualized learning opportunities. Children are encouraged to develop a positive disposition toward schooling and learning. The curriculum adheres to The Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (**GELDS**). More information on current standards is at www.gelds.decal.ga.gov

Statement of Inclusion

The PreK believes all children have a fundamental right to learn and grow together. Every child, regardless of any individual differences that exist, is welcomed in the program. The program incorporates best practices in early childhood and special education.

Values and Beliefs

GSW PreK believes all children should be respected and valued. This includes:

- ❖ providing an inclusive setting for all children
- ❖ establishing and maintaining a play oriented, child centered environment
- ❖ employing a developmentally appropriate curriculum
- ❖ implementing of best practices
- ❖ employing caring and competent professionals

Additionally, we believe

- ❖ children must be actively involved in the learning process
- ❖ children should be encouraged to demonstrate their individual creative characteristics
- ❖ children should be involved in experiences leading to independence, making choices, and discovering learning
- ❖ the differences, as well as similarities of individuals should be experienced and celebrated

Curriculum

The curriculum at GSW PreK is based on developmentally appropriate practices. The Creative Curriculum was adopted by GSW PreK. Creative Curriculum is a comprehensive curriculum, based on research, written by national experts, and designed so that all children can learn! This curriculum incorporates literacy, math, science, social studies, and creative arts into each unit.

Field Trips & Special Events

Children's learning is facilitated and enriched through participating in a variety of field trips and planned special events related to ongoing studies and content standards. Parents must provide written consent or permission for the child to participate. Children may not participate if written permission is not provided. All field trips are closely supervised. Parents who accompany and/or participate with their PreK children must make other arrangements for siblings who are not enrolled in the program unless the field trips/special events are designated as family events. Children are expected to participate with their class on field trips even if a parent or guardian is attending. The PreK program will request a per child donation per field trip. Donations requested will not exceed a total of \$25 per child per year. Parents/guardians must cover their own expenses for field trips.

Program Operation

GSW PreK program for four-year-olds is a lottery funded Georgia Pre-Kindergarten program. There is no cost to attend this program. A maximum of forty children can participate in this full-day (6.5 hours) program, 180 days, in two classrooms. All children must be four years of age on or before September 1 of the participating year to qualify for admission.

General Information and Policies

Program Employees

GSW PreK employees consist of the Program/Site Director, two certified lead-teachers, and two assistant teachers.

University Students

GSW PreK functions as an instructional program at Georgia Southwestern State University. As a result, numerous university student's complete fieldwork in the PreK each semester. University students may participate in a variety of ways, usually working directly with the children in some supervised capacity. They are closely supervised by the Program employees who are a constant presence in the classroom. The involvement of university students provides pre-kindergartners with one-on-one interaction with adults and enriches the lives of the children as well as the professional lives of our GSW university students.

Enrollment

Enrollment in the program is based on the following priorities: GSW faculty and staff and students and then community applicants. Children may be placed on an interest list prior to their preschool enrollment year. Parents of children on the waiting list are notified in January/February of the enrollment year in which their child qualifies and given acceptance priority. An open-enrollment period before the academic year of enrollment is announced in January/February for remaining slots in the preschool program. Children are considered enrolled when all application materials are completed and on file with the pre-k.

Registration Information

In order to be served by GSW PreK, the primary caregiver must complete and provide the following:

- Registration form
- Parental agreement form
- Emergency contact card
- Current Georgia Department of Human Resources Certificate of Immunization Form # 3231 with the date of expiration or school attendance block checked and proof of Haemophilus influenza type B (Hib) vaccination
- Birth Certificate
- Current Certificate of Eye, Ear, Dental, and Nutrition Examinations, Georgia Department of Human Resources Form 3300
- Pre-K Student Information Form

A copy of a child's Social Security card is needed to enroll children with the state pre-k funding agency. Parents who cannot provide a copy of the card or who are in the process of obtaining a card must sign the appropriate form provided by the pre-k director.

Residency Requirement

The child must be a Georgia resident. For purposes of this program, Georgia resident is defined as a child who resides in the state of Georgia. **Proof of residency should be part of a child's on-site file prior to or on the first day of PreK.** Examples of proof of residency include the following: current lease, property tax notice, homeowner's insurance bill, mortgage statement, current vehicle registration form, letter from shelter, letter from employer if employer provides housing, any utility bill listing the residence as the service address, and current PeachCare eligibility documents for the child. A cell phone bill or a driver's license is **not** an acceptable proof of residency. If a student's family is living with someone else, parents should provide a notarized affidavit from the property owner stating where the child's family is residing, plus a copy of the property owner's proof of residency (any items listed above).

Active duty military families can support Georgia residency with a copy of official military orders verifying Georgia residency during the school year.

If residency is not verified, a child cannot participate in the state lottery funded PreK program.

Attendance Information

GSW PreK serves as a model demonstration program for Georgia Southwestern State University. The preschool school year is aligned with school calendars of area schools. The projected days of operation for each year are supplied in advance to allow parents to plan alternative childcare options. The hours of operation are from 7:50 – 2:20, Monday through Friday for the Georgia PreK students. Children may be dropped off between 7:50 and 8:10 am and should be picked up between 2:20 and 2:30 pm.

Caregivers are requested to notify the Center if a child will be late or absent. Children should be in the classroom by 8:00 (*Children arriving after 8:10 am will be marked tardy*) in order to benefit from the daily curriculum and must attend regularly to maintain their enrollment. Children are dismissed at 2:20 pm and should be picked up by 2:30 pm at the latest. Besides being disruptive to the class, children arriving late and leaving early can have a difficult time keeping up and understanding what is expected of them. Attendance records for children start in prek and these records become part of the child's permanent record.

Chronic tardiness is defined as late arrival or early departure more than once per week. A child is considered tardy at 8:10 am.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing more than two days per month without medical or other reasonable explanation. Chronic tardiness or absenteeism may also be defined by an established regular attendance pattern(s), e.g., if a child is late every Monday or absent every Tuesday or leaves early every Friday.

Students who are chronically late and/or absent are in danger of being disenrolled.

Consecutive Absenteeism

Children who do not attend class for 10 consecutive days without a medical or other reasonable explanation **must** be removed from the roster.

After three unexcused absences or tardies, a letter is sent to parents concerning attendance. At six unexcused absences or tardies, the Project Director will be contacted and parents will receive a letter and a copy is maintained in the child's file. At six unexcused absences or tardies, the Project Director will also hold a conference with the parents concerning the absences and/or tardies. If the problem with absences/tardies continues, the student(s) will be in danger of being disenrolled.

A parent must agree to send the child to the PreK program for 6.5 hours of instructional time for the full school year. A child who is chronically tardy or absent can be disenrolled from the program. A child who is not picked up at the end of the PreK day on a regular basis can be disenrolled.

A student whose parent or legal guardian is in military service in the armed forces of the United States or the National Guard, and such parent or legal guardian has been called to duty for or is on leave from overseas deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, shall be granted excused absences, up to a maximum of five additional school days per school year, for days missed from school to visit with his or her parent or legal guardian prior to such parent's or legal guardian's deployment or during such parent's or legal guardian's leave. Families shall provide a written statement for the child's file to document the absence.

Snack and Lunch

For healthy development, children need a daily snack in addition to lunch. Children are asked to bring a nutritious snack each day. Snacks are **packed separately** from the lunch and the snack should be labeled.

A **spill-proof** drink is required for both snack and lunch. Children **may not bring soda** in any type of container. Children who bring soda will have their drink replaced with water.

In addition, children need to bring a nutritious lunch from home each day. This may be kept in a sack or lunchbox in the child's cubby. Food items that need to be heated in a microwave or refrigerated are acceptable. Because of the time involved, the following guidelines should be followed concerning meals that need to be heated:

- Provide only foods that can be heated in 1 ½ minutes because of time considerations (do not send Easy Mac or microwavable dinners)
- Make sure the meal is in a microwave-safe container
- Make sure the containers needing to be heated or refrigerated are labeled with your child's name.
- Cold packs are needed to keep lunches/drinks cool.
- Provide ketchup if part of the meal requires ketchup
- Do not send food a child does not like to eat

Birthday Celebrations

***Birthday parties will be limited to the teachers, children and parents only.**

We are excited to celebrate a child's birthday with his/her family. However, elaborate celebrations become disruptive to the on-going educational programming in the center. If a family would like to bring a cake or cupcakes on a child's birthday, we will be pleased to recognize your child's special day. Party favors are not permitted. Birthday parties will be at the end of the day at 2:00. Please contact your child's teacher to make party arrangements.

Rest Time

Children participating in the Georgia PreK will have a maximum of a one-hour rest time. The child is assigned a cot, but each child should bring a cover for the top of the cot and to cover the child. A child may also bring a small stuffed animal or other soft toy for this time. These items are kept in individual cubbies and sent home at the end of the week for laundering. If a child brings a stuffed animal, please label with the child's name. We strongly recommend not sending the most favorite stuffed animal that is needed to sleep at night.

Arrival and Dismissal of Children

Arrival: Parents must **park in the School of Education parking lot next to the playground**. Parents may not park in faculty parking. Parents **must walk their children** to the PreK wing using the sidewalk and holding their children's hands. The side entrance (facing East Glessner with the covered drive) of the College of Education building is the official Entrance and Exit of GSW PreK.

The main entrance (center of the School of Education building which leads to the rotunda) is the main entrance for GSW students and faculty. **Parents of GSW PreK are NOT allowed to enter the building through the main entrance at arrival or dismissal.**

When it rains, parents may drive under the covered area at the side entrance of the School of Education. An assistant teacher will be on duty from 7:50 until 8:10 the mornings it rains to assist the children as they exit their cars and enter the building. Temperature checks on rainy days will be done in the child's car prior to the child entering the building. After 8:10, parents will need to park and walk their children to the side entrance.

Dismissal: Parents may begin lining up in their cars in an orderly manner in the driveway leading to the College of Education's covered drive at 2:00 pm. Parents **MUST STAY IN THE CAR**. GSW PreK faculty will monitor the dismissal car line the first few days of dismissal to assist parents with lining up correctly in line. Dismissal will not begin until 2:20 each afternoon. GSW PreK teachers will assist children into the car but parents are asked to assist their child in buckling. Parents should drive with caution in the school zone.

Arrival and departure times are extremely hectic times in the classroom. With the exception of emergency situations, parents are encouraged to save lengthy conversations with the staff for a more appropriate time in the day. It is helpful to give teachers a note in the morning about any concerns, and then when teachers have time during the day, they can call parents and have a discussion. Policies are recommended to ensure the safety of the children. **The Driveway is not used for Parking**, and Public Safety regularly monitors the area. No child of any age is to be left unattended in any vehicle for any reason.

If a parent needs to pick up a child earlier than the regular dismissal time, the parent should notify the faculty so a child's belongings are ready. After 2:00, early dismissal is not allowed without a Dr. excuse. Consistent early departure is discouraged because it disrupts the child's participation in the educational activities of the day. Dismissal is an important time for reviewing the day's activities and preparing children for the exciting learning that will take place the next day.

During the first week of school, parents and other drivers at dismissal may be asked to show identification. Only parents, guardians, and those people listed on the Emergency

Card (completed at Meet and Greet) may pick up children. If someone new is picking up the child, it is the parent's responsibility to provide **written** permission.

Late Pick-Up of Children

Children should be picked-up from the prek between 2:20 and 2:30 for Dismissal. GSW PreK does not provide extended care. It is necessary to charge a baby-sitting fee of \$5.00 for each 5 minutes beyond 2:30 pm a child is left in the center. The fee is used to pay the cost of a babysitter and administrative costs.

If a child has not been picked-up and contact with a parent or authorized person on the pick-up list cannot be made (e.g. phone numbers have been disconnected) prior to 3:00 pm, GSW PreK reserves the right to ask for the local authorities'/agencies' help in contacting the parents and/or authorized persons for the dismissal of the child.

Chronic late pick-up may result in dismissal from the program due to Bright From The Start protocol.

Parent Attire

The School of Education is a professional building. Parents are asked to dress appropriately when they bring children to school and when they pick them up at the end of the day. Parents are asked to not wear pajamas/undergarments when bringing children to school.

Disciplinary Procedures

The following procedures will be followed by GSW PreK concerning disciplinary actions. Disciplinary actions will be followed if a student at the GSW PreK participates in any behavior that is disruptive to the learning atmosphere (for example, but not limited to: use of inappropriate language or profanity, causing harm to other children and/or teachers, causing harm to GSW property, etc.)

1st Offense: A note will be sent home by classroom teacher. Program/Site Director will be notified of the offense. Documentation of the event will be filed in the child's folder

2nd Offense: Parents will be contacted by the classroom teacher and/or the Program/Site Director. Documentation of the event will be filed in the child's folder.

3rd Offense: Parents will be contacted by the Program/Site Director. The child/children involved in the event will be removed from the classroom setting and sent home for the remainder of the school day. Parents will be contacted and asked to pick their child up immediately from school. A parent conference with the parents, classroom teacher, and program/site director will be scheduled to set up a plan of action to insure the behavior does not continue in the school setting. Documentation of the event and the conference will be filed in the child's folder. The Dean of the School of Education will be informed of the situation.

4th Offense: Parents will be contacted by the Program/Site Director. The child/children involved in the event will be removed and suspended from the classroom setting. The total number of days suspended will be determined by the Project/Site Director and the Dean of the School of Education.

Immediate Suspension

An immediate suspension for up to two (2) days can be made at any time the PreK provider determines a child is causing harm to himself/herself, the classroom teachers or other children, or a child is unable to successfully participate in program activities. Parents will be contacted immediately in this situation.

Extended Suspension

An extended suspension (i.e., more than two days and/or more than three incidents of immediate suspension) may occur in the following instances:

- chronically disruptive
- Represents a documented habitual pattern of behavior
- Repeatedly or substantially interferes with the teacher's ability to communicate effectively with the students in the class or with the ability of the other students to learn; and/or causing harm to himself/herself or others
- Involves three (3) or more incidents of aggression that could cause serious injury and significant property damage or destruction.

Dis-Enrollment

Children may be dis-enrolled from the Georgia's PreK Program if they are hurting themselves or others and/or are chronically disruptive to the extent that they are not benefiting from the PreK program. Families will be given assistance in obtaining resources to help the child benefit from the program, including assessment referral and treatment options. Disenrollment of a child for behavior reasons is the last step taken after all other attempts to help the child within the program have been exhausted.

Communication

We encourage parents to inform the staff of any situation that may affect the effectiveness of the school experience for a child. Family members are asked to write down any messages to staff and leave them in the morning. Although teachers would like to talk with families about their child's day, the arrival and departure time for children are the busiest times of the teachers. Parents are asked not to use this time to discuss questions or problems concerning the pre-k or their child. Parent-Teacher conferences or phone conversations can be scheduled upon request. Of course, if parents have issues that must be addressed immediately, they can ask the faculty to secure additional supervision so that you may meet with them privately.

Families should check their child's bag and Remind daily. A newsletter is published several times a month and is sent using Remind frequently. Included in the newsletter is specific information about activities at the PreK.

Parents are encouraged to communicate with teachers regularly. Teachers collect information regarding each child's skill levels through portfolio or observation assessment. These assessments are related to the Creative Curriculum and the GELDS. The teacher will schedule a minimum of two parent conferences to share this information with the families.

Teachers notify parents, in writing, of significant or special events happening at the PreK. Parents are encouraged to send notes to school concerning special events at home. Telephoning is the least effective method for parents to communicate with teachers from 8:00 – 2:20. Obviously the faculty is working with the children and cannot answer the phone. However, parents can leave messages for the faculty or send an e-mail message. Calls will be returned after the children leave school each day. If parents have an emergency, please call 229 931-2145 to get a message to the classroom.

Discussions about a child's attendance, behavior, educational progress, etc. are only discussed with the child's parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

Release of Children

Children are only released to authorized individuals listed on their emergency card. The emergency card will be completed at the Meet and Greet. Identification is required of those authorized individuals who are unfamiliar to the staff. If emergency changes must be made, caregivers must phone and send a written note to the Center to inform the teacher of the change.

In the interest of every child's wellbeing, children who have symptoms of illness, such as an elevated temperature ($>99^{\circ}$), vomiting, diarrhea, eye discharge or pink eye, lice, severe cold and/or runny nose, or a draining rash are required to stay home. The child must be free from illness for 24 hours before returning to school. In the case of lice, a note from a practicing physician will be required stating that lice and nits are no longer present. If symptoms of illness are observed at the PreK, the child will be isolated, and a parent will be notified to pick up the child.

For minor injuries, such as scraped knees, basic first aid procedures are used. In cases of severe injury, the staff will refer to the Medical Authorization Form to arrange hospital emergency care.

Health screenings are necessary for Georgia's PreK students so that any problems that might interfere with the child's ability to learn can be identified and addressed as soon as possible. Parents are asked the date of the child's last health exam as a means of meeting requirements recommendations from the state agency that oversees the PreK program. Additional verification is required for Category One Children. The Georgia Department of Community Health guidelines require that any child eligible for Medicaid or PeachCare receive a full health exam at ages four and five. Therefore, our program is required to verify that Category One children have received their full health exam upon entering Georgia's PreK. Appropriate referrals and follow-ups to parents of Category One children who have not received a full health exam are given. If a Category One child continues to attend the program without a full health exam, our state consultant is notified.

All children attending Georgia's PreK Program must have a Certificate of Eye, Ear and Dental Examinations (Georgia Department of Human Services Form 3300) and a DHS Certificate of Immunization (Form 3231). Form 3231 must have either the *date of expiration* or *school attendance* block checked. Children who attend PreK must be up-to-date on all immunizations required for school entry. Children may register and begin

attending before completion of these examinations and certificates. However, the immunization certificate must be on file within 30 calendar days. Expired certificates must be updated within 30 calendar days of the expiration date.

Any child who does not have a completed certificate within the 30- or 90-calendar day time frames should be asked not to return to the program until an updated certificate is provided and is on-site. A child who presents a valid appointment card for either a 3231 or 3300 appointment can remain in the program until the date of the appointment.

Unscheduled Closing

In the case of severe weather such as snow, flooding, hurricanes or tornadoes, the PreK director will make the decision if it is necessary for GSW PreK to close. If Georgia Southwestern State University closes the campus due to bad weather, the PreK will also close. The GSW website, Remind app, the local radio stations, and local news reports will generally update viewers as to school closings. Any other unscheduled closing will be reported to families as soon as possible through written notice, telephone communication, and/or e-mail. Make-up days may be required for days missed due to weather. Of course, if parents feel it is unsafe to travel to GSW, they should not do so. Children travel to GSW from several surrounding counties, and weather can vary at different locations.

Health and Safety Procedures

The following health and safety procedures are followed:

- ❖ Fire and tornado drills are conducted regularly. Evacuation routes are posted in each of the classrooms.
- ❖ The Center maintains a first aid kit.
- ❖ The staff washes their hands frequently and appropriately as children are nurtured and handled.

Clothing

Children should be dressed appropriately for play. Clothing should be sturdy, washable, and comfortable. Children will often have contact with activities involving water, sand, and paint and should wear clothing appropriate for these activities. Children should wear appropriate footwear. Inappropriate footwear is the cause of many accidents.

A complete change of clothing (it is best to include two sets of underwear and socks) labeled with the child's name and placed in a Ziploc bag needs to be left at school. If a child's clothing becomes soiled, the child will change into the provided clothing and the soiled clothes will be placed in the Ziploc bag and placed in the child's cubby to be taken home. If a child needs extensive cleaning to be comfortable in the classroom, parents are notified to come to the prek. Clothing should be seasonable and fit the child. Clothing should also be clothing the child will wear. It is not wise to send clothing the child hates hoping faculty can coax the child to wear the clothes.

Belongings

All personal possessions should be labeled with the child's name. Toys, candy, gum, jewelry, make-up, purses, large stuffed animals and money **ARE NOT PERMITTED**. Toys from home tend to get lost or damaged and cause problems among the children.

The classroom teacher will establish a sharing time on specific days during the school year. On those days' children may bring books, music, trip souvenirs, nature items or some item of educational interest. **Toy weapons are not allowed in the Center under any circumstances.**

Pictures

Individual and group pictures are made during the school year. These pictures are available for purchase; however, a purchase is not required to have a child's picture taken.

Photographing/Videotaping

Sometimes photographs and/or videotapes are made of children working in the prek for advertisement or educational purposes. In order to be served at GSW PreK, parents must sign an authorization allowing GSW to photograph/videotape enrolled children.

Permission to Participate in Research Projects

Because of the PreK's association with the university, we occasionally have requests from professors and/or university students to use our classrooms for research purposes. Whenever research projects are planned at the PreK, an informed consent form is provided before any child participates in the study. If the research is a classroom-based project (and most are), families who desire their child not participate may be asked to make alternative arrangements during the implementation of the study. We will attempt to make the results of research that is conducted available to families.

The website decal.ga.gov has a wealth of information for parents who have children in the PreK program. Refer to www.decal.ga.gov for PreK parent postings and a family handbook.