

NEEDHAM PRESCHOOL

Family Handbook



2021-22 School Year

1155 Central Avenue
Needham, MA 02492
(781) 455-0416

Welcome!

The Needham Preschool is the first step in your child's journey into the Needham Public Schools! Our program is comprised of six classrooms located in the Newman Elementary School, and we serve the educational needs of students who are three, four, and five years old in the town of Needham. Classrooms are taught by masters-level teachers who are certified in both early childhood education and special education. This training and expertise enables teachers to differentiate their instruction and provide a rich and supportive learning environment for all children.

We are proud to offer an integrated preschool program in which children with different skills, needs, and interests are educated together, which is an inclusive educational model widely supported by research. Classes are limited to 15 students and are supported by the teacher along with at least two teacher assistants (TAs).

Needham Preschool follows a developmental whole child philosophy. We focus not just on kindergarten readiness skills, but also on building your child's social-emotional skills and a love for learning. We help your child to become intellectually curious, promote play skills and friendships, develop their independence and problem-solving skills, and, most of all, build their confidence, enthusiasm, and joy for learning and school.

We have dedicated and highly specialized early childhood staff in our program, which is reflective of the commitment of the Needham Public Schools to early childhood education. Children benefit from the support and expertise of our Speech-Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, School Psychologist, Board Certified Behavior Analyst, and Pediatric Nurse.

We have a supportive Preschool Parent Teacher Council (PTC) and SEPAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council) who work closely with us to support a positive and robust early childhood community that is inclusive for all learners.

Preschool Staff

Preschool Office

Xenia Papoulias, Preschool Program Specialist
Rebecca Sparrell, Preschool Director

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Preschool Nurse

Kate Wilk, Preschool Nurse

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Preschool Teachers

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Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)

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Preschool TAs

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Karen McTernan
Patricia Murphy
Maureen Quinn-Composto
Elizabeth Rutkin
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Preschool Speech-Language Pathologists

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District Physical Therapist

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Preschool Occupational Therapists

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Shannon Shavor (OT Assistant)

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School Psychologist

Michele Petteruti

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Needham Preschool Curriculum

“Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence.”

Copple, C., and Bredekamp, S. Eds., NAEYC, 2009

The Needham Preschool is centered on activities that build your child’s kindergarten readiness—but that readiness goes far beyond letters and numbers. We want your child to develop the literacy skills that lead to reading, and we also want them to be compassionate enough to ask a new friend in the classroom to play. We want your child to learn to write their name, and we also want them to learn to be resilient enough to complete a task that is challenging for them. We want your child to learn their numbers, and we also want them to learn that what really counts is being a well-rounded member of society—and that development starts as early as preschool.

We focus on your child’s social-emotional and academic success in the following areas:

- Small Group Learning Skills
- Social and Play Skills
- Literacy Skills
- Circle Time Skills
- Transition Skills
- Daily Living Skills
- Motor Skills

A growing body of research from diverse disciplines, including the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, concludes that early social and emotional learning lays an essential foundation for academic learning and success in life.

Research also shows a strong link between social and emotional learning and student gains:

- Greater school engagement and commitment
- Higher levels of empathy and pro-social behaviors
- A more positive school and classroom climate
- Increase self-efficacy and confidence
- Gains on standardized achievement tests

Additionally, research shows that social and emotional learning reduces the risks of:

- Substance abuse
- Mental health issues
- Emotional distress
- Behavior issues
- Risky behavior later in life

(Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)

The Needham Preschool follows:

- [Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and Kindergarten: Social and Emotional Learning Standards and Approaches to Play and Learning Standards](#)
- [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences](#)

Social and Emotional Learning Standards

- **Self-Awareness**
 - Children will be able to recognize, identify, and express his/her emotions.
 - Children will demonstrate accurate self-perception.
 - Children will demonstrate self-efficacy (confidence/competence).
- **Self-Management**
 - Children will demonstrate impulse control and stress management.
- **Social Awareness**
 - Children will demonstrate empathetic characteristics.
 - Children will recognize diversity and demonstrate respect for others.
- **Relationship Skills**
 - Children will demonstrate the ability to communicate with others in a variety of ways.
 - Children will engage socially and build relationships with other children and adults.
 - Children will demonstrate the ability to manage conflict.
 - Children will demonstrate the ability to seek help and offer help.
- **Responsible Decision Making**
 - Children will demonstrate beginning personal, social, and ethical responsibility.
 - Children will demonstrate the ability to reflect on and evaluate the results of his or her actions and decisions.

Approaches to Play and Learning Standards

- Children will demonstrate initiative and independence.
- Children will demonstrate eagerness and curiosity as a learner.
- Children will be able to maintain focus and attention, and persist in efforts to complete a task.
- Children will demonstrate creativity in thinking and use of materials.
- Children will cooperate with others in play and learning.
- Children will seek multiple solutions to a question, task, or problem.
- Children will demonstrate organizational skills.
- Children will be able to retain and recall information.

Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences

These guidelines reflect the Massachusetts Department of Education's commitment to quality, in order to ensure a solid foundation for learning and school success. Learning is structured through play and meaningful activities in a developmental sequence. Young children need many and varied opportunities to:

- **Plan:** Children consider what they are going to do with materials and how they are going to do it.
- **Play:** Children use materials and equipment in ways that best suit their personal curiosity and understanding.
- **Reflect:** Children recall things that happened to them, reinforcing or questioning their understanding.
- **Revisit:** Children practice skills and replay experiences in many different ways, with each activity refining or modifying previous learning.
- **Connect:** Children, with the help of staff, connect new knowledge with past experiences, creating links among subject areas and areas of skill development.

English Language Arts

Foundations for learning in the English Language Arts are critical to all other curriculum areas, as well as to the child's social and emotional development.

Children develop the basis for verbal communication in early childhood.

Children begin to appreciate literature and the joy of reading by being read to at home and school.

A solid foundation in language development promotes success in reading and writing in the future.

Preschoolers are more likely to want to read and write when their imaginations have been engaged through being read to.

Mathematics

Mathematics relates to ideas and concepts about quantity and addresses logical and spatial relationships.

The foundation of mathematics at the preschool level is formed out of children's concrete experiences and is not limited to "math time."

Mathematics is embedded into almost all daily classroom activities and play opportunities. Preschoolers learn to recite numbers in order, compare quantity, comprehend position, match objects in one-to-one correspondence, number concepts, and develop foundations for understanding two- and three-dimensional shapes.

Science and Technology/Engineering

Young children are naturally curious about what things are called, how they work, and why things happen. The foundations of scientific learning lie in inquiry and exploration.

Earth and Space Sciences include describing properties of the earth, such as observing and discussing different environment elements, weather, and times of day.

Physical Sciences include investigating natural forces, such as exploratory play and art experiences.

Life Sciences include the study of living things, such as understanding life cycles.

Technology/Engineering involves finding out how things are constructed and work, and thinking about what we can do to make them work differently/better, such as designing, building, and testing solutions through play.

History and Social Science

Learning in history and social science is built on children's experiences in their families, school, community, state, and country.

Preschoolers begin exploring these concepts with questions that are important to them such as "Who are the members of my family?", "Where do we live?", and "Who are my neighbors?"

This standard is intended to help children acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed in community life, as they learn to cooperate, share, and respect the rules of the classroom.

Additionally, children develop a civic identity through learning to participate in simple decision-making, listening to stories about the people and events we celebrate, and becoming familiar with national symbols.

Health Education

In the preschool years, brain and body development are critically linked.

Through physical activity and body movement, the brain internalizes directionality and position in space, which are critical to mathematical thinking and early reading and writing.

Activities that promote physical development help children develop skills and confidence in using their bodies and equipment.

Socially, children learn how to play in a group setting, take turns, wait for a turn, learn expectations, rules and routines, share, lead, follow, and be a friend.

Emotionally, children learn to start to develop independence and confidence.

Arts

Arts education begins with a foundation that emphasizes exploration, experimentation, and engagement of the senses, through drama, music, and painting.

The arts often serve as a vehicle for children to demonstrate their understanding in other content areas.

Children experiment freely with arts materials to see what happens, notice how their work looks different from their peer's work, and learn that their effort leads to the production of a satisfying result.

Arrival and Dismissal

We appreciate your promptness in dropping off and picking up your child.

Teachers will meet students outside for arrival, and students will be brought outside for dismissal. Due to the pandemic, we are limiting access to our school to students and staff only at this time. Thank you for understanding.

We have set up colored spaces outside the preschool entrance for students to gather. Each teacher's color can be found [here](#).

If your child will be picked up by someone who is not on your emergency form, please communicate this change with your child's teacher in writing (email preferred). Anyone picking up your child who is not listed on your emergency form should present an ID when they arrive. Additionally, anyone picking up your child who is listed on your emergency form but is not familiar to the classroom staff should present an ID when they arrive.

As is the case with all school parking lots, we appreciate that ours can get crowded during arrival and dismissal. Please read the following to ensure a safe and smooth experience for all children:

- Please only park in designated parking areas, and do not park in the van lane, walkway, along the island, or on the island itself.
- Please drive slowly and proceed with caution in our parking lot. When entering the circle, please keep to the right as you would in any traffic circle.
- Handicapped parking spaces should only be accessed by vehicles with a handicapped placard.
- Please remember that the large Newman parking lot (located on your right when you pull into Newman) is always available to you and typically has open spaces.
- Thank you for walking your child to the Preschool entrance using either our sidewalk or walkway (designated by orange cones) and holding their hand as you cross the parking lot.
- We ask that you refrain from letting your children run up the hill next to the playground, as this has resulted in injuries in the past.
- Please share this information with anyone who may be a part of your child's arrival and dismissal routine.
- We are continuing to work closely with our Transportation Department to ensure the safe arrival and dismissal of our students.
- Thank you for helping us to keep your children's safety as our top priority!

Daily Schedule

A typical day might consist of the following:

- Transition into the classroom followed by teacher-facilitated play with peers. Your child's developing skills in transitioning from a parent or caregiver at arrival and into the classroom with their peers builds the foundation for resilience and independence. We know it isn't always easy in the beginning—but it always gets better!
- Morning Meeting is an opportunity to start the day with learning and following a classroom routine, listening to others, learning each other's names and greeting peers, turn taking, understanding of calendar and weather, and opportunities for music and movement.
- Tabletop activities and art projects build your child's language, fine motor, sharing, and self-advocacy skills.
- Choice Time is an opportunity for children to explore and learn through play. Options include block area, dramatic play, math manipulatives, writing center, reading area, listening center, puzzles, puppets, science exploration, painting/drawing, etc.
- Snack Time provides an opportunity for small group discussions, practicing social skills, and building self-help skills.
- Outdoor Play is an essential part of your child's motor development. Physical activities include running, climbing, building, and balancing. Indoor activities in inclement weather might include music and movement and activities such as obstacle courses.

Social Thinking

The Needham Preschool also uses the Social Thinking program, which was developed by Speech-Language Pathologist Michelle Garcia Winner. The program works to help children develop social competencies to better connect with others by working on activities such as being a part of a team, sharing space with others, understanding one another, and developing meaningful relationships.

Playground and Eastman Conservation Area

The preschool playground is a play space for the preschoolers during the school day. The playground is closed to the public on weekdays before, during, and after school.

The Eastman Conservation Area includes a boardwalk that winds through the conservation area down the hill from the preschool entrance. We love using this beautiful addition to the school with students for nature walks.

Special Education Services

Special education services provide specialized instruction to students who have been identified through testing as having a disability that prevents them from making effective progress in school. Parents/guardians are a large part of this process in sharing their insights and concerns for their children. If a child is found eligible for special education services, a team meeting is called, including parents and teachers, to develop the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). This program is designed to support the student's access to the general education curriculum. Special education evaluation and services can only be provided with parent permission. If you would like more information or believe your child may have a disability, please contact the Preschool Office.

Parent Teacher Council (PTC)

The Needham Preschool PTC is a group of preschool parents working together with the preschool staff to create the best possible experience for their children. The PTC has three primary responsibilities:

- To create a sense of community among preschool families.
- To serve as a communication vehicle among parents and staff to discuss educational and school community matters.
- To raise money for creative enrichment programs (special events and activities that complement and extend the preschool curriculum) as well as classroom and teacher

needs. Please note that many curriculum enrichment activities are not possible during the 2021-22 school year due to limiting school access to students and staff.

The PTC keeps in touch with parents via email to share information about upcoming events, meetings, parent nights out, fundraising, and volunteer opportunities. For more information, you can contact our PTC Liaisons at needhampreschoolptc@gmail.com.

Needham Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)

The Needham SEPAC is comprised of parents of special education students who have joined together to provide information and support to each other. SEPAC meets regularly with school administrators to give input on the policies and programs that affect their children, and hosts speakers and informational sessions for parents. For more information, you can contact our SEPAC Preschool Liaisons at preschool@needhamsepac.org or visit the SEPAC website at needhamsepac.org.

Curriculum Enrichment and Special Events

For the 2021-22 school year, our curriculum enrichment events will be limited to reduce crowding. We will hold our Back To School Night via Zoom.

Communication with Staff

The preschool office can be reached at (781) 455-0416 ext. 55140. Staff members welcome and value the opportunity to meet and talk with parents. During the 2021-22 school year, meetings will be held via Zoom. Please note that it is difficult for teachers and therapists to meet with parents when school is beginning, ending, or in session, so parents are encouraged to contact staff via email to set up meetings: firstname_lastname@needham.k12.ma.us

Listening Conferences and Progress Reports

Listening conferences are offered at the beginning of the school year as an opportunity for parents to speak with your child's teacher/s about your child. Teachers offer an additional parent conference in January. Progress reports are sent home twice per year in January and June. We make an effort to discuss children when they are not present, so thank you for arranging childcare during conferences with teachers.

Partnership Between Home and School

Our strong relationship with preschool students and parents is the foundation of our program. We strive to support you and your child in every way possible, and ask you to communicate with us if your child or family has a need for which we can provide guidance and support. The preschool staff members are experienced educators and many are parents too, so we understand sensitive

and complex family situations. Here are some suggestions that the staff offers for common situations:

Managing Anxiety and Transition

Children are always watching and following the lead of the adults in their lives. In our experience, children are better able to demonstrate flexibility with change when that flexibility is modeled positively by their parents. Due to their age and development, we encourage you to use positive and simple language with your child whenever possible.

Visual Schedules

Teachers use visual schedules all day long in their classrooms to support children. A visual schedule can also help support a child at home, especially during busy times such as a move or another change to the family. There are many templates that can be found online for creating visual schedules. We are also happy to help you develop one.

Positive Behavior Support

Positive behavior support is a broad term that describes establishing settings, structures, and systems to facilitate positive behavior change. We strive to use positive statements that instruct a child what to do (“I keep my hands by my sides when I walk down the hall”) rather than statements that tell a child what *not* to do (“Please stop waving your arms in the hall”). We talk about behaviors as “expected” and “unexpected,” which comes from the Social Thinking program. We reinforce children who are behaving in an expected way rather than focusing on a child who is behaving in an unexpected way.

Absences, Midday Pick Ups, and Late Arrivals

If your child will be absent:

- Please email our Preschool Program Specialist, Xenia Papoulias (xenia_papoulias@needham.k12.ma.us) as well as your child’s teacher.
- If your child is absent due to illness, please include the School Nurse, Kate Wilk (kate_wilk@needham.k12.ma.us).
- If your child arrives to school late, please ring the buzzer outside the preschool door to reach the office, and we will send a staff member out to meet your child.
- If you are picking your child up early, please ring the buzzer outside the preschool door to reach the office, and we will bring your child outside to meet you.
- If your child accesses van transportation services, please contact them about any changes to your child’s transportation needs on a particular day (such as if they are absent). The best way to contact them is via email at transportation@needham.k12.ma.us which is continuously monitored during the school day.

Important Forms

We ask that all families complete a **Class List, Photo Release & Emergency Information** form. This form also enables the school to share class list information for planning birthday parties and other events.

Please be sure to share any updates in phone numbers, emergency contacts, babysitters/nannies, daycare schedules, etc. with the Preschool Office.

In addition, please be sure to return your child's **Nurse Emergency Card** to Nurse Kate so that the school has updated health information for your child, as well as the best way to reach you during the school day in the event of an emergency.

What Does My Child Need To Bring?

Please provide your child with a backpack, snack bag, a healthy nut-free snack/s and/or lunch if applicable, a seasonally appropriate change of clothes (including underwear and socks), and any toileting supplies that your child may need. If at all possible, please do not send your child to school with food or drink in glass containers.

Parents should not provide snacks to children younger than four years old containing these foods: hot dogs either whole or sliced into rounds; whole grapes; nuts; popcorn; raw peas and hard pretzels; or chunks of raw carrots or meat larger than can be swallowed whole.

Children should come to school dressed comfortably in clothes they can play in, as well as use items such as paint and glue. Please dress your child for outdoor play (warmer/cooler clothing) as the weather changes. We encourage closed toe shoes with a rubber sole for safe playground access and participation in active play. Please remember to label all items of clothing and other belongings that you send into school with your child.

Please ensure that your child wears a mask to school, and contact us if your child is not able to wear a mask at this time.

Classroom Visitors and Volunteers

For the 2021-22 school year, the only adults in the school will be employees or contracted service providers of the Needham Public Schools.

Kindergarten Transition

Kindergarten transition is an exciting process that your child's preschool team will support you during. The Superintendent of Schools hosts an evening event, Know Your Needham Schools Night, in January. This is an opportunity to learn more about your child's transition to

kindergarten and ask any questions that you might have. The preschool will also host a kindergarten transition meeting, and we will share information about kindergarten registration and kindergarten orientations at each of the elementary schools.

Summer Program

The Needham Preschool offers a six-week summer program that runs from the beginning of July through mid-August. This program is available to all preschool students, and many families take advantage of the opportunity for their child to attend. Detailed information about the summer program will be shared in February to allow for your family to plan ahead and reserve a space.

For students with special education services, eligibility for Extended School Year services is discussed annually at your child's annual IEP meeting.

Enrollment and Registration

For students who do not present with special education needs that require placement in a classroom, applications for tuition slots are accepted on the first business day following Labor Day for the following school year. Applications are posted on the school website and students are accepted on a first come, first serve basis, with priority given to current students who intend to return for the following school year. Families are notified in October if there is a spot for their child in the following school year. Enrollment is secured when the deposit has been made and registration is complete, including complete health clearance verified by the nurse. Each student receives a developmental screening prior to starting the preschool program.

Health Guidelines

The goal of the school health program is to promote and maintain a healthy and safe school environment for preschool students and staff.

The information that we gather about your child's health and medical history enables us to identify children with special health care needs and develop a health care plan that anticipates possible emergency situations. If your child does have a medical issue, such as food allergies, seizures, reaction to bee stings, asthma, significant seasonal allergies, or any other medical issue or concern which we should be aware of, please contact the nurse. Several of our preschoolers have allergies to peanuts and tree nuts and we ask for your assistance in not sending in any snacks or lunch which contain peanuts or tree nuts.

School health records are maintained for each child and are kept confidential in the school health office.

The following information is required prior to starting preschool:

- A physical exam within the past year

- Up to date immunizations
- Health assessment form
- Lead level

The following services are provided by the school nurse: health and wellness promotion, illness and injury prevention, assessment, and intervention, medication administration, communicable disease prevention and control, communicating and collaborating with students, parents/guardians, school staff, and health care providers, and vision and hearing screenings.

COVID-19 Guidelines:

When testing is needed, please remember that the district requires a molecular test. The most common type of molecular test is the PCR. If you are unsure if you are getting a test that is accepted, please contact Nurse Kate.

While a runny nose alone does not require a Covid test, it may require that your child stay home if your child is not able to contain their nasal drainage. In preschool, this generally means that they must be able to wear their mask as usual.

The daily attestation is specific to Covid related concerns. If your child has other signs of illness, please contact me if you need guidance regarding school attendance.

As an additional resource, you may review the district illness guidelines at [this website](#).

Symptoms of COVID-19 for unvaccinated students:

These symptoms alone require testing:

Fever over 100°F and/or chills

Difficulty breathing and/or Shortness of breath

New loss of taste or smell

Muscle or body aches

Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)

Sore throat

Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

These symptoms require testing only if they occur in combination with each other or any of the symptoms above:

Fatigue

Nasal congestion or runny nose

Headache

Please keep in mind that we have students who have underlying medical issues and if they get sick it can have serious implications for them.

If your child is mildly ill but is unlikely to be able to participate fully in their school day, they should remain at home. If your child appears ill at school, the school nurse will call you to pick up your child as soon as possible. We cannot prevent all illness, but by working together we can minimize the spread of germs.

It is very important to keep the school nurse updated on any changes in medical conditions or illnesses, contagious diseases, injuries, behavioral or emotional issues, change in family situations, medications, or hospitalizations. The school nurse can be contacted at the Preschool Office at (781) 455-0416, ext. 55153 or by email at kate_wilk@needham.k12.ma.us.

Toileting

Preschool staff will assist you in carrying out your child's toileting routine. Please discuss any special accommodations with your child's teacher.

Children will wash their hands with liquid soap and running water after toileting. Staff members wear gloves when assisting children with toileting, and wash their hands with liquid soap and running water after assisting children with toileting. Paper towels are used to dry hands.

When handling clothing soiled with bodily fluids, staff members will wear gloves and bag clothing in sealed plastic bags, storing them apart from other items.

Birthday Celebrations

We love birthdays in preschool! Due to food allergies and district wellness initiatives, we do not celebrate birthdays at school with food. Please contact your child's teacher to find out about other special ways to celebrate your child's birthday at school.

Safety Drills

Being a part of a school means periodic safety drills. Fire drills are unannounced and supervised by the Needham Fire Department. During a fire drill, preschool students line up with their classes and we walk outside to the island in our parking area. We practice being calm and quiet, and the entire process only takes a few minutes.

The Needham Public Schools has adopted the ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) protocol for student safety. At the preschool, we will hold a meeting for parents on ALICE prior to conducting an ALICE drill. We will inform parents before an ALICE drill will take place at the preschool.

If your child talks with you about a safety drill that took place at school, we encourage you to use simple language with them, and remind them that their teachers always make sure they are safe. If you have any questions, please contact the Preschool Office.

Early Releases

Please make note of the [early release and delayed opening days](#) during the 2021-22 school year.

On early release days, only morning students come to school, all students dismiss at 11:20 AM, and there is no lunchtime at school.

On delayed opening days, only afternoon students come to school, afternoon students arrive at 12:30 PM, and there is no lunchtime at school.

Weather Watch

The preschool follows [Child Care Weather Watch](#) guidelines which recommend avoiding outdoor play when the weather is considered to be dangerously hot or cold.

Snow Cancellations

If the Needham Public Schools are closed due to snow, the preschool is closed as well. If there is a delayed opening due to snow, there is no morning program, and students who participate in the afternoon program arrive at 12:30 PM. Information about weather-related school closing can be found on TV, radio, and online, as well as via the superintendent's Twitter account: @NPS_Supt. Please do not call the school directly for this information.

Special Circumstances

If there are any special circumstances at home, such as changes to childcare, vacation, a move, illness, new member of the family, or death in the family, please notify your child's teacher so that we can support your child in adjusting to the situation.

Please note that we are not able to honor special requests for certain staff members to work with your child.

Newman Campus

The Newman Campus is closed on days that school is in session from 7:30 AM – 4:00 PM. Passing through and dog walking are not permitted. Only students, staff and individuals dropping off and picking up students are permitted. Preschool families should travel around the perimeter of the school. For the safety of all children, please do not cut through the playground, Eastman or the track around the fields. Thank you!

We Want To Hear From You!

We are here to support your child and family. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Preschool Office with any questions, suggestions, or ideas for how we can best support you and your child.

The district will provide all students an effective basic education that does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, homeless status, gender identity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or age.