



Parent Handbook

Early Childhood Family
Education

Albert Lea Area Schools

Brookside Education Center

211 W. Richway Dr.

Mission Statement:

ECFE will strengthen families and support the ability of all parents to provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth and development of their children. ECFE will provide a comprehensive curriculum based on best practices and research on early brain development and learning.

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All Educators have, at minimum, a bachelor's degree and are licensed by the Minnesota Department of Education. Educational Assistants are in some classrooms as well. Continuing education and staff in-service trainings are provided throughout the year.

Table of Contents:

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)	4
ECFE Series Class Format:	
Parent-Child Interaction	5
Circle Time	5
Parent-Child Separation	5
Parent Education	5
Early Childhood Education:	
Learning Through Play	6
Classroom Expectations – Behavior Policy	7
ECFE Guidelines:	
Parent-Child Interaction Guidelines	8
Parent Education Group Guidelines	9
Early Childhood Family Education from A to Z:	
Absences	10
Arrival	10
Bathroom Needs	10
Behavior	11
Cell Phones	11
Classroom Cleaning Procedures	11
Clothing	11
Early Childhood Programs	12
Early Childhood Screening	12
Early Childhood Special Education	12
Evening Classes	13
Family Resources	13
Food	13
Guests	13
Handwashing	13
Home Visits	13
Illness	14
Immunizations	14
Inclusion	16
Mandated Reporting	16
Online Classroom	16
Parent Advisory Council (PAC)	17
Photos	17
School Closings	17
Sibling Care	18
Sibling Care Guidelines	18
Solicitations	19
Special Events	19
Toys	19
Weapons	19
Volunteers	19

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of Birth to Third Grade. The program is offered through Minnesota public school districts. ECFE is based on the idea that the family provides a child's first and most significant learning environment and parents are a child's first and most important teachers. ECFE works to strengthen families. ECFE's goal is to enhance the ability of all parents and other family members to provide the best possible environment for their child's learning and growth.

Parent-Child Engagement Classes

Engagement classes promote the interaction between parents/guardians and their little learner. These classes focus on a variety of different developmentally appropriate activities to be enjoyed together, helping to build that parent/child bond. These include one-time classes or other Special Events.

Parent-Only Classes

A licensed parent educator leads a conversation with parents on a variety of parenting topics. These classes provide an opportunity to learn more or dig deeper into your parenting philosophies.

Early Childhood Education Series Classes

Early childhood education runs simultaneously with parent education time and gives children the opportunity to participate with the licensed early childhood teacher, the educational assistant, and other children in free-choice activities. Activities begun during parent-child interaction may be continued and new activities will be introduced during this time.

Early Childhood Education Goals are for Children to:

- develop and express imagination and creativity,
- express feelings and energy in healthy ways,
- build strength and control of their bodies,
- increase ability to concentrate, and
- develop a positive attitude toward learning.

ECFE Series Class Format

Parent-Child Interaction

Parent-child interaction provides parents and children opportunities to try developmentally appropriate play and learning activities. Language development, literacy-based activities, and math readiness activities are introduced.

Circle Time

Circle time includes parents and children and is led by the early childhood teacher. This can include songs, stories, and/or concepts to build communication skills. We realize that sitting and listening may be difficult for some young children. Parents and staff will work together to ease into appropriate circle time behaviors.

Parent-Child Separation

For our separating classes, parents head next door for parent education following parent-child interaction time. Children stay with the early childhood teacher and an educational assistant for play. The door between rooms remains open. All toys remain in the classroom to encourage children to stay as well. Staff will work with you and your child to make separation as smooth as possible.

Parent Education

The goal of parent education is to strengthen the parent-child relationship by providing relevant, effective education resources and support. Parent education is an opportunity for parents to discuss ideas and concerns ranging from child development to family relationships. A licensed parent educator leads the discussion and provides information based on research and knowledge of child development and family education. Parents are encouraged to share their experiences and observations with the group.

Learning Through Play

ECFE weaves a “learning through play” philosophy into each class. Learning comes best when children are given space, materials, and time to play. Children experience the following play and learning activities in the early childhood classroom:

- **Expressive Activities:** Children express their creativity with art materials. Since children learn by doing, we focus on the process of creating rather than the product created.
- **Imaginative Play:** Dolls, blocks, puppets, transportation toys, dress-up clothes, and pretend play all help children use their imagination with role-playing activities.
- **Large Muscle Activities:** Running, jumping, hopping, catching, throwing, etc. are all activities that encourage large muscle coordination.
- **Small Muscle Activities:** Activities such as cutting, gluing, printing, painting, coloring, lacing, buttoning, zipping, kneading play dough, and fitting puzzles together provide children with practice in developing eye-hand coordination and small muscle development.
- **Activities to Encourage Social and Emotional Skills:** Children develop their social and emotional skills by playing with other children and learning from adults.
- **Thinking Activities:** Language, shapes, colors, sizes, letters, and numbers are the basis of cognitive (thinking) activities. Teachers use books, music, stories, educational games, and puzzles to help children develop problem-solving abilities and acquire school readiness skills.

Classroom Expectations — Behavior Policy

It is important that all children feel good about themselves, develop good self-discipline, and consider other people's needs. We have established the following behavior guidelines:

- The environment is arranged in a manner so that children may choose from many activities and materials. However, staff will offer choices if disagreements arise between children while engaged in these activities.
- It is important for children to play both cooperatively and independently. Cooperation, however, is emphasized over competition.
- It is important that staff help children identify their feelings and manage them appropriately. We want children to know that it is okay to have good and bad feelings. We also want children to learn to express their emotions appropriately.
- Staff strive to state rules clearly and positively to children. It is important to focus on children's positive behaviors. However, when a child's behavior becomes inappropriate, we will take the following steps:
 1. Staff will tell the child what he/she should do and why, rather than what not to do.
 2. If necessary, staff will redirect the child to another activity and offer choices.
 3. In rare circumstances, staff will remove the child from the situation to a different area of the classroom.
 4. Staff will help the child reflect upon his/her actions and decide what appropriate behavior is needed so the child can return to the group.
 5. Staff will seek parent involvement if the child is unmanageable. Communication is important between staff and parents.

Early Childhood Family Education Guidelines

Parent-Child Interaction Guidelines

Parents are a child's first teachers. Activities during parent-child interaction time promote healthy family relationships and offer parent teaching opportunities. The following guidelines will help you and your child experience a successful interaction time:

- Smile, laugh, relax, and enjoy the experience.
- Follow your child's lead. Visit activities your child is interested in first.
- Follow your child's pace and continue to try other activities too.
- Include other parents and children in your interactions and activities. This shows your child how to be friendly with others.
- Verbalize. Use simple language to describe what is happening.
- Get down to your child's eye level by stooping or sitting on the floor.
- Reinforce. Stay positive. Establish a firm basis of support and trust.
- If an activity is full, encourage your child to try something else and come back. Waiting is a good skill to learn.
- Please keep adult interaction to a minimum during Parent-Child Interaction. Although building parent relationships is important in class, this time frame is dedicated to the parent-child relationship.

Parent Education Group Guidelines

Parenting is a time for you to share your joys and challenges of being a parent. Please remember:

- There are many good ways to be a parent, so try not to judge others.
- Please silence your cell phones during class time and refrain from using cell phones for non-emergency calls and texts.
- It is alright to share ideas from your discussions outside of the group, but please do not share names.
- This is your group, and much of what you get out of it depends on what you put into it.
- Please be respectful when someone is speaking. Side conversations make it difficult for the person talking.
- It is important that all parents return to the early childhood classroom at the same time. Children may become frightened if they don't see their parent when other parents arrive.
- Please do not bring food or drinks into the Parent Café for your child. This may cause jealousy, and children are expected to remain in the classroom during Parent Education time.
- Please exit only through the Café door during class time. Children may become confused that it is time to leave and need their parent.



FROM A to Z

Absences

We recognize that a family illness or emergency may prevent you from attending an ECFE class with your child on occasion. If this happens, another adult family member or caregiver can accompany your child to class. If you or your child are absent more than two consecutive class times, your teacher will call or email you to check in.

Arrival

Please be on time for class. It is easier for your child to be successful when he/she can participate in the same things as everyone else. Because teachers are preparing their classrooms, the doors will not be open until five minutes before class time. If you arrive early, please wait in the hall or visit our Oasis Library, room #206. This includes between class times if attending both.

Bathroom Needs

Diapering your child should only be done on the changing table in the children's bathroom #200. Staff cannot assist in diapering, but if your child is toilet learning, please let your teacher know if staff can take your child to the bathroom or if you should be called. Men's restroom is #207 and women's is #243.

Behavior

Albert Lea ECFE believes in positive discipline. When difficulties arise, we encourage you to talk calmly and redirect your child to other choices. We realize it is not always easy to remember this during a difficult situation! That's why we are always available for more ideas, information, and support.

Cell Phones

Cell phone calls or texting can be disruptive to the classroom and to the flow of the parenting session. Please turn off or silence your phone when you come in.

Classroom Cleaning Procedures

We clean tables, toys, and equipment with a disinfectant after each class. If you notice your child mouthing a toy, place it in the sink when he/she is done playing with it, and it will be washed. Our clean-up procedure of bodily fluids follows school district guidelines.

Clothing

Dress your child in washable, comfortable play clothes so he/she will be free to participate in all activities, including messy activities. Tennis shoes allow your child to play and climb! Remember to bring shoes in the winter when your child wears boots to school. Bring extra clothes if your child is toilet learning.

Early Childhood Programs

The following are District 241 Early Childhood Programs:

- * Early Childhood Family Education
- * Early Childhood Special Education
- * Early Childhood Screening
- * Home Visiting
- * School Readiness/Pre-Kindergarten
- * Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK)

Early Childhood Screening

Early Childhood Screening is a free check of children's height, weight, immunizations, health, vision, and development. State law requires that children be screened before they enter school. Screening identifies concerns that can be addressed well before a child enters kindergarten. A child can be screened anytime after their third birthday. We recommend screening your child before their fourth birthday, especially if you have concerns (ie: hearing, vision, speech, behavior, development). Please don't wait until a child is five to have them screened. To schedule an appointment, please email nancy.tatarek@alschools.org or call 507-379-5176.

Early Childhood Special Education

While all young children grow and change at their own rate, some children experience delays in their development. If you have concerns about your child's talking, playing, behavior, ability to learn new things, or interaction with other people, we can help. Please contact the lead teacher at 507-379-5188 if you have questions, or look for more information at helpmegrowmn.org.



Evening Classes

Pre-register for sibling care. If no children are signed up, an Educational Assistant may not be available. Also, the Oasis Library should be available for 15 minutes before/after class.

Family Resources

Resources are available in the parenting room to check out at no cost. They include children's books, books on parenting, child development, discipline, and family relations. You may keep books for three weeks at a time. Please return all borrowed materials to the teacher.

Food

Please do not bring food/snacks or drinks (bottles or sippies) into the classroom or Café. Parents may have allergy or germ concerns, and it may cause jealousy issues as well.

Guests

Only children who are registered will be allowed to participate in class. Visiting children will be expected to use sibling care. Any exception must be approved in advance. However, feel free to bring along a grandparent or other meaningful adult for a visit.

Handwashing

Staff, parents, and children are encouraged to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer when they enter the classroom. Children are taught to wash their hands/use sanitizer during the day as needed—after using the toilet, after blowing their nose, and after playtime.

Home Visits

Under certain circumstances, a licensed teacher is available to make home visits. If a family is unable to attend site-based classes, a teacher will bring children's activities and parenting ideas for parents and children at home.

Illness

In order to maintain a healthy environment for children, parents, and staff, please follow this Illness Policy. Children may not attend class or sibling care if they are ill or exhibit symptoms of an ongoing illness. The following information will help guide you as you make your decision on whether or not your child is well enough to go to school. Please keep in mind that we do have some medically fragile children in our building whose well-being relies on those around them being healthy.

Immunizations

Immunizations are important for your child's good health. Children need immunizations to protect them from diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, chickenpox, hepatitis B, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, and polio. The immunization schedule recommended by the Centers for Disease Control may begin with the first Hepatitis B injection in the hospital shortly after your baby is born. Following the recommended schedule will give your child the best protection against childhood diseases.

The State of Minnesota requires all children to have certain shots before they enter licensed daycare, preschool, kindergarten, and seventh grade. The number of immunizations required varies with a child's age. If you are not sure your child is up to date on immunizations, call your family physician's office. If your insurance does not cover the cost of immunizations, contact Public Health for information.

All ECFE and School Readiness Preschool children must have health and immunization records on file at the site of the early childhood class.

Please keep your child home from class if he/she:

- has had a fever of 100 degrees rectally (99 degrees orally) or more. Please keep your child home until his/her temperature has been normal (98.6) for 24 hours.
- has vomited or has diarrhea. Please keep your child home until 24 hours have passed since the last episode.
- has an undiagnosed rash, discharge from eyes, or yellow or green nasal discharge. Keep your child home until you are sure it is not contagious.
- has an ear ache, harsh or persistent cough, or sore throat.
- has been diagnosed with Strep Throat or another bacterial infection requiring antibiotics. Please keep your child home until he/she has been on antibiotics for 24 hours or more.
- if your child has needed Tylenol or Motrin before school or he/she is not well enough to be in school and would really rather be home with you!

If your child exhibits any of these symptoms while in class or sibling care, you will be asked to leave immediately. Please don't be offended. We are only trying to maintain a healthy environment for everyone. We recognize that children can come down with symptoms very quickly, and your child may have appeared just fine when you left home.

Please note: Children being treated for a contagious disease need to be on medication for 24 hours before returning to class or to sibling care. Notify Registration 507-379-5176 as soon as possible if your child has been in school with a contagious illness. We will inform other parents that their children may have been exposed.

Inclusion

Children make their first friends in our classes. Some of our classes include children with special needs.

Mandated Reporting

State law mandates all public school staff to report suspected physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect of children to Freeborn County Child Protection Services or the county of the child's residence. It is our intent to support and provide resources to parents who may be experiencing difficulty in raising children.

Online Classroom

Parentopia is our online classroom option. You will receive information about how to access your child's class and stay updated on ECFE happenings through the general discussion. No pictures are to be copied without expressed permission. Go to parentopia.org to sign up. Find the Albert Lea Early Learning site and request to be a member. Ask your teacher for more details.



Parent Advisory Council (PAC)

The Parent Advisory Council is a group of Albert Lea Area School District parents who provide input for early childhood program development, including class design and family and community events. New members are always welcome. Call Melissa at 507-379-4852 for more information.

Photos

There are occasions when District 241 and/or the media photograph or videotape students while in school or participating in school-sponsored functions to be used in a variety of classroom and/or outreach opportunities. There is a release at the end of the handbook allowing or denying this option.

School Closings

Albert Lea ECFE follows the Albert Lea School District's procedure for school closings. If the District starts school late due to bad weather, morning classes will be canceled. For information on closings or late starts, listen to local television or radio broadcasts. To receive calls from our school messenger for closings and reminders, be sure to fill out your phone and email on the final signature page.



Sibling Care

Sibling care is available for some classes. Parents must contact Nancy at 507-379-5176 at least **three** days prior to class to make arrangements. An additional fee is due at registration. An occasional “drop-in” basis will be provided if there is space available. There is a \$2 per child fee that must be paid that day. The purpose of sibling care is to provide a safe, supervised environment staffed by Educational Assistants for children, birth to age six, while parents are enrolled in a class. Parents with babies up to 3 months old can choose to keep their babies with them in class or enroll them in sibling care to be able to give your full attention to the class. Some ECFE classes run on days the district does not have school. Please try to make other arrangements for older children.

Sibling Care Guidelines

These guidelines will make your child’s stay in sibling care more enjoyable. If you have any questions, please ask.

- All siblings should arrive toileted and with dry diapers. Parents will be asked to change their own child’s diaper if necessary.
- Please feed your child before coming to sibling care.
- Please bring along a blanket, pacifier, or any other comfort item your child uses at home. Be sure to label all items with your child’s name.
- If your child is having a difficult time separating, you may be asked to return to sibling care to comfort your child.
- Please pick up your child immediately after class. Children may become frightened if they don’t see their parent when other parents arrive.
- The sibling care room will not be staffed until five minutes before the start of class. Please give the child care workers time to prepare the room for your child.
- Children will not be allowed to stay if they are showing any signs of illness noted in our Illness Policy.

Solicitations

Teachers will monitor soliciting of products or services by parents in the class so that other parents do not feel an obligation to buy. ECFE staff are prohibited from selling products or services during class time.

Special Events

ECFE hosts a variety of events throughout the year. These include:

- Oasis Library Literacy Nights
- STEAM Classes
- Thursday Night Specials
- Parent-Only Classes
- Halloween Party
- Carpentry Night
- And Other Special Classes

Look for notice of these and other events in the Albert Lea Early Learning book, on FaceBook, and on our district website.

Toys

Please keep violent toys such as guns, swords, action figures, etc. at home. All other toys should remain in your bag. Toys are provided for exploration.

Weapons

Weapons are not allowed on school district property.

Volunteers

Early Childhood has many volunteer opportunities. If you have talents you would like to share, please talk to your classroom teacher, parent educator, or the ECFE office.

Albert Lea Area Schools District Mission Statement:

To ensure individual academic, social, and emotional growth that leads to engaged citizens and lifelong learners.

