**Fort Thomas Independent Schools**

**Preschool Program Handbook**

**2020-2021**

**Preschool Location**

Ruth Moyer Elementary School

219 Highland Avenue

Fort Thomas, KY 41075

859.441.1180

**Preschool Staff**

Sommer Rosa: Director (859.815.2009)

Dawn Laber: Principal (859.441.2300)

Megan Leising: Teacher

Elizabeth Alter: Teacher

Brittany Humphreys: Speech/Language Pathologist

Donna Rizzo: Instructional Assistant

Lauralee Foley Instructional Assistant

**Mission Statement**

The mission of the Fort Thomas Independent Schools Preschool Program is to meet the individual needs of its students through a culture of expectation, engagement, and ongoing growth toward kindergarten readiness.

**Eligibility**

The Fort Thomas Independent School District has board policies for the location, identification, and placement of three (3) year old students with disabilities, and four (4) year old students with disabilities or at-risk factors who reside within the jurisdiction of the district. Policies address each requirement in the administration regulations concerning Preschool Education for Four-Year-Old Children (704 KAR 3:410) and Preschool Education for Children with Disabilities (707 KAR 1:150).

The Fort Thomas Independent Schools Preschool Program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, or handicapping condition. Children are eligible for enrollment in the preschool program if they are:

1. Residents of the Fort Thomas Independent School District or children of current staff members
2. At least three (3) or four (4) years old on the date of enrollment
3. Disabled, as defined by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the Fort Thomas Independent School District Policies and Procedures Manual for Exceptional Children
4. Or, if they are four (4) years old on or before August 1st of the current school year and meet federal guidelines for income eligibility criteria (160% of the poverty level) at enrollment. Once determined eligible, these students remain eligible throughout the school year regardless of any changes in financial status.

It should also be noted that the preschool program offers a limited number of tuition-based slots to children who are not eligible to participate in the program free of charge (i.e., via disability or financial status).

**Child Find**

The preschool program maintains an active recruitment process to ensure the timely identification, evaluation, and enrollment of eligible children. There are two developmental screenings scheduled at the beginning and end of each school year (August 2020, May 2021). Additional screenings are scheduled periodically throughout the year (January 2021). Information about screenings is distributed throughout the community via flyers, school marquees, and the district website. Please contact preschool staff if you or someone you know needs assistance or needs preschool information presented in another language.

During the developmental screenings, children participate in stations with preschool teachers, instructional assistants, and other staff to assess vision and hearing, as well as cognition, communication, and motor skills. Also, parents/caregivers are asked to provide additional information in the areas of social/emotional skills and self-help/adaptive skills.

**System of Interventions**

Research-based instruction and intervention are required prior to or as part of the preschool special education referral process. When the results of a developmental screening indicate a potential delay in one or more areas, the Director of Preschool and/or preschool staff meet with parents to discuss and explain the preschool Response to Intervention (RTI) process. In such cases, the parent has the option to allow the child to participate in the preschool program temporarily in order to receive instruction and intervention in targeted areas. This intervention process continues for approximately six to eight weeks, during which time teachers implement instruction and interventions, and collect progress monitoring data. At the end of the intervention process, a meeting is convened with the parent to analyze the data and discuss how the child has responded to instruction and intervention. Children who have made adequate progress with no further concerns are dismissed from the intervention process and are not eligible for preschool services. Children who have not made adequate progress may continue in the intervention process for appropriate next steps, which may include additional interventions and/or a referral for an evaluation to determine whether the child presents with a disability and is eligible to receive special education services and supports through the preschool program.

**Admission and Required Documents**

Once determined eligible for preschool, enrollment is optional and at the discretion of the parent. Parents are encouraged to visit and observe preschool classrooms prior to enrollment. For those parents who choose to enroll their child in preschool, the following documents must be completed and returned:

1. Preschool enrollment form
2. Proof of residency
3. Certified copy of birth certificate
4. Income verification
5. Copy of social security card (optional)
6. KY physical examination form
7. KY immunization form
8. In addition, a vision examination by an optometrist or ophthalmologist should be submitted to the school no later than January 1st of the first year of preschool enrollment.

In terms of preschool materials, we ask that every child have a backpack. Teachers send notes, student work, and important information home in the backpack, so be sure to check it each night. We also ask that each child have a complete change of clothes. If your child is wearing pull-ups or diapers, we ask that you send in a supply of pull-ups and wipes so that we may address his/her toileting needs. Please put your child’s name on any item brought to school. Please do not send toys or candy to school. Consult your child’s teacher before sending any treats or special items to school (e.g., birthday treat, etc.).

**Calendar and Hours of Operation**

The preschool program is in session four days per week, Monday through Thursday. Children attend either morning sessions (8:00am-11:00am) or afternoon sessions (12:00pm-3:00pm). Children do not attend preschool on Fridays. The preschool program operates on the same calendar as Fort Thomas Independent Schools, though the preschool start and end dates are adjusted. The preschool start date for 2020-2021 is September 2, 2020. The end date is May 14, 2021. On Fridays and during the two-week periods at the beginning and end of the school year when staff are present and preschool students are not, know that teachers and instructional assistants are engaging in various activities on behalf of students and families (e.g., instructional planning, parent/teacher meetings, home visits, evaluations, etc.).

Preschool will be cancelled in the event of inclement weather, as determined by the superintendent. Please refer to local radio and television stations, as well as the district website for information on school delays and closures.

**Attendance**

The preschool program believes that consistent attendance is critical to child development. If your child cannot attend school on a given day, please contact his/her teacher so she will be aware. Absences of four consecutive days (or attendance that is otherwise inconsistent and cause for concern) will result in a phone call and/or home visit from the teacher so that the district can be aware of the situation and lend any assistance or support as appropriate.

**Health**

To maintain a healthy environment, the preschool program requires that children who are sick stay at home. Children are sick if they have a fever of 100.4 degrees or more, are vomiting, are experiencing diarrhea, or have unidentified rashes or other symptoms which can be transmitted to other children. Children should be symptom free for 24 hours before returning to school. If a child becomes sick at school, parents will be notified so arrangements can be made to pick-up the child. In the event of a medical emergency involving the administration of first aid, the building principal and parents will be notified so that further decisions can be made as appropriate. Please be sure your child’s contact information is accurate and remains current so that staff can contact you in a timely fashion.

**Medication**

If your child requires medication while at school, please bring it to the attention of the preschool teacher. Do not send it to school in your child’s backpack. Medication must be in the original bottle with a prescription label. Know that appropriate forms must be completed and signed by the parent or guardian before any medication can be administered at school. Any over-the-counter medications must follow the same guidelines, and physicians must sign paperwork before any over-the-counter medication can be administered.

**Classrooms**

The preschool classrooms are staffed with a certified teacher and an instructional assistant. An additional instructional assistant floats between the two classrooms to offer assistance as needed. These educators participate in professional development activities relevant to their job responsibilities and as required by the Fort Thomas Independent School District. Decisions regarding student placement and group size are made with consideration given to the individual needs of students; however, the maximum class size is 20 students, and staff follow established procedures for assistance to be sure that the ratio of students to adults does not exceed 10:1 (i.e., an additional adult is contacted for assistance; if that adult is unavailable, the school office is contacted for assistance).

**Curriculum**

The preschool program is developmentally appropriate and utilizes the Develop. Inspire. Grow. (DIG) Curriculum. DIG is a research-based early childhood curriculum that emphasizes creativity and provides developmentally appropriate experiences across domains in the areas of social/emotional, oral language, math, and literacy. In preschool, children are encouraged to explore, experiment, and problem-solve in a supportive and caring environment. Our program promotes a positive self-concept, an acceptance of all children, and the facilitation of friendships. Classrooms provide a language-rich environment, and staff teach, guide, and model appropriate adult and peer communication and interaction at all times. Classroom instruction and materials are reflective of various people, places, cultures, and abilities. The program utilizes teaching and learning activities as appropriate to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and supports and accommodations are in place for all children as appropriate.

Due to the nature of the preschool program and individual student needs, the schedule must have both structure and flexibility. Classroom rules and expectations are communicated clearly in developmentally appropriate language. Students participate in a variety of large-group, small-group, and individual activities, some being teacher-initiated and many being student-initiated. The preschool program includes opportunities for ongoing student observation and developmentally appropriate assessment, including information from parents, for the purpose of informing instruction to address student needs, both individually as students and collectively as classes. Student progress and assessment information in the various developmental areas is shared regularly with parents via meetings, phone calls, daily communication, etc.

**Meals**

Preschool students are provided breakfast or lunch at a district-established price (or reduced price or free of charge for those who qualify). Be sure to contact your child’s teacher regarding any food allergies, and provide her with medical documentation so that appropriate substitutions and accommodations can be made. All meals are served in the preschool classrooms under the supervision and guidance of the preschool staff. Of course, children may choose to bring their own breakfast or lunch to school. At such times we ask that parents give careful consideration to the contents of their child’s meal, and remember that preschool staff work hard to teach and model healthy, nutritious eating habits.

**Outdoor Play**

Outdoor play promotes a healthy lifestyle and is an important part of child development. The preschool program uses the preschool playground area year round, weather permitting and provided the “feels like” temperature (accounting for wind chill and heat index) ranges from 40 to 90 degrees. Please dress your child appropriately for weather conditions (and contact preschool staff for assistance as needed). Know that preschool students have access to suitable indoor play areas when weather conditions prevent the use of the outdoor preschool playground.

**Transportation**

Transportation to/from preschool is the responsibility of the parent/family, and please know that preschool children will only be released to parents and caregivers on the student pick-up list. If under other circumstances someone new will be picking up your child, your child’s teacher must be notified in writing ahead of time. That person will be required to show a photo ID before your child will be released to him/her.

The Fort Thomas Independent School District does, however, provide transportation for eligible preschool students who require such services (e.g., certain issues related to their disability; certain issues related to family income, etc.; contact the director of preschool for more information). The preschool program follows all applicable policies relevant to the transportation of preschool children. Each school bus that transports preschool children includes a bus monitor who is trained to assist in the transportation, care, and supervision of preschool children. The monitor is responsible for delivering and receiving the child safely to and from the parent, guardian, or a person authorized by the parent (in writing). If the parent, guardian, or person authorized by the parent is not present to receive the child at drop-off, the child will be returned to school at the completion of the bus route and parent will be contacted to come pick-up the student.

**Parent Involvement\***

Parents and families are children’s first and most important teachers. Active parent involvement is a critical component of our preschool program. There are many ways parents can be involved in the program. Parents are always welcome to visit our classrooms (be sure to check-in at the front office to receive a visitor’s pass). Parents who wish to volunteer in the classroom may do so after completing a criminal background check and receiving appropriate training. Contact preschool staff if you are interested in volunteering. Additional parent involvement activities include parent/teacher meetings, home visits, parent trainings, and other school activities.

**Home Visits\***

Preschool teachers are required to conduct at least two home visits each year for each child in their classroom. Home visits help parents and teachers develop positive working relationships. Home visits also allow teachers to observe students in their home settings, and they are a great opportunity for parents and teachers to discuss student progress and address any questions or concerns. In addition, home visits help children understand that their teachers care about them and that school is important.

**Collaboration with Community Agencies**

The preschool program collaborates with local community agencies (e.g., childcare, healthcare, social services) to help coordinate resources and services for children and families. Also, the preschool program participates in the regional Early Childhood Council, a group of community agencies that work cooperatively to coordinate services for young children and their families. The preschool program collaborates with Head Start to ensure the full utilization of both programs. In addition, the preschool program works cooperatively with First Steps to ensure that eligible students have an IEP in place prior to their third birthday and experience a smooth transition into preschool (and First Steps coordinators are always welcome at preschool eligibility meetings).

**Program Evaluation**

The preschool program engages in ongoing efforts to evaluate program effectiveness. Toward the end of each school year, parents and staff complete program evaluations. The results are analyzed and used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and to improve its ability to serve students and families as effectively as possible.

**\*These services are temporarily suspended for the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID19 pandemic.**