

School District of Manatee County Early Learning and Family Support Center

PreK Family Handbook 2024-2025

PreK Leading the Way!

The mission of the School District of Manatee County is to educate and develop all students today for their success tomorrow.



Early Learning and Family Support Center
6423 9th Street East Bradenton, FL 34203
941-753-0958

Goals of the Early Learning and Family Support Team are to:

- Build a strong foundation for our early learners, ensuring their future success as they demonstrate continuous social, emotional, and cognitive growth along standards-based learning progressions, PreK – 12.
- Build a strong foundation for our early learning teachers, ensuring ongoing professional growth through learning and collaboration for continuous growth along the continuum for implementation of a standards-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum.
- Build a strong foundation by partnering with families of our early learners, ensuring they have access to resources; information and guidance that will enable them to support and enhance their child's approaches to learning (foster curiosity, encourage persistence, express creativity, and provide opportunities for planning and reflection through play).
- Build a strong foundation for early learning in our community, ensuring the needs of our early learners are addressed both inside and outside of the school day.

Our Philosophy:

We believe that all children are intelligent, creative and resourceful and that they communicate their individual gifts in many different “languages” including the arts, literacy, math, science, social/emotional, and physical languages.

We respect all families as essential collaborators who contribute distinct experiences and knowledge we value as an integral part of our early learning program.

We create learning communities of children, families, and educators whose work depends upon listening and responding to each other's needs.

We provide opportunities for children to take the initiative in their own learning as they make sense of the world.



EARLY LEARNING AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) is a program that is funded by the Division of Early Learning at the Florida Department of Education. The Manatee County School District (MCSD) offers the VPK program free of charge to families as either a 540- instructional hour school year program or a 300- instructional hour summer program. Families may select either the school year or the summer but not both. All children who reside in Florida, turning four by September 1st of the school year, are eligible to participate in a VPK program. Children with VPK delayed enrollment certificates are not eligible for placement in a school district VPK program.

To participate in the free 3 hours of VPK instruction, parents must obtain a VPK Certificate of Eligibility (COE) from the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County. To apply for the certificate, a parent/guardian must submit verification of the child's age and proof of residency.

Early Learning & Family Support Evaluation Center

The Early Learning and Family Support Evaluation Center offers developmental screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluation and consultation service for young children suspected of having delays or disabilities. The Early Learning and Family Support Evaluation Center screens and evaluates pre-kindergarten children who are not enrolled in public school. These services help to identify their educational needs and determine if they qualify for special education services through the Manatee County School District.

Exceptional Student Education (ESE) PreK Ages 3-5 years

Children who have been identified, evaluated, and determined eligible for a ESE services, will receive an Individual Education Plan (IEP) by the school district. Services outlined in a child's IEP will help determine a full day placement or outpatient therapies. All MCSD ESE PreK classrooms have a certified teacher and a paraprofessional to provide support and instruction. Children may receive services that include speech, language, occupational therapy, or physical therapy according to their IEP throughout the school day.

Soar in 4- Activating parents to be their child's first literacy teacher.

Soar in 4 is a monthly program that is held at The Bishop Museum of Science of Nature. In addition to receiving free entrance to the museum families meet experienced educators for tips on how to become their child's first literacy teacher and how to prepare their child for kindergarten. Families receive materials to continue activities at home and new books. In addition, families meet with community resource partners. Our partners infuse literacy activities as they promote their events.

Soar in 4 Story Time in 5 public library corners are held twice a month at Manatee County Public Library locations. Families participate in a read aloud and learn how to support their child's language development through activities and songs. Each family leaves with new materials and books to continue expanding vocabulary at home. The larger a child's vocabulary at the age of two, the better prepared she or he will be for kindergarten.

Soar in 4 Give Away Libraries have been placed on 17 Title I elementary school campuses. Even before they start kindergarten young children deserve to participate in learning experiences led by caring and well-trained adults. Parents and caregivers should have access to the support they need to encourage their children's development. These libraries ensure that families have access to new books in their neighborhood 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Soar in 4 Story Book Trails are a new way to improve literacy and reading confidence in students. Pages of a book are turned into panels for families to practice reading, learn literacy tips and get exercise while they stroll through the pages of a book in a local park. Audio is provided in English and Spanish. The first installation was in Lincoln Park.

Soar in 4 Bradenton Reads! 235 street pole banners will be hung throughout the City of Bradenton on Main Street, Rossi Park, the Riverwalk, and Village Of The Arts featuring student artwork. In addition to the student artwork, the banners also feature literacy tips and a QR code that links to the Soar In 4 website where parents can learn more about being their child's first literacy teacher and ongoing Soar In 4 events.



ABOUT OUR CLASSROOMS

Curriculum

Manatee County School District's VPK curriculum is framed by The Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards: 4-Years Old to Kindergarten (2017). The standards describe the developing skills four-year olds should know and be able to do by the end of their prekindergarten year. The curriculum is designed so that students are developing toward these standards-based outcomes with individualized support within a collaborative setting. The curriculum encompasses development in eight essential areas: physical development, approaches to learning, social and emotional, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific inquiry, social studies, and creative expression through the arts. Within the framework of standardized learning outcomes, the curriculum includes a scope-and-sequence for teaching and learning over the school year with opportunities for teachers and partnering paraprofessionals to support children according to their individual learning needs. The curriculum documents include a year-long curriculum map summarizing key learning outcomes with more detailed learning goals provided in the quarterly unit guides for scientific inquiry, literacy and language development, and mathematical thinking and reasoning. The High Scope Preschool Curriculum along with a variety of materials provides teachers instructional support for implementation of the curriculum for academic subject-area learning in these eight areas.

Assessing and Communicating Children's Progress

The Early Learning Family and Support Team, and MCSD prekindergarten teachers value on-going, two-way communication with parents and families. It is our goal to consistently communicate the successes and challenges your child is experiencing so that families are informed about their child's progress toward meeting expectations and together we can support your child's growth. Instruction and assessment go hand- in-hand. Your child's teacher conducts on-going formal and informal assessments to monitor your child's progress toward the end-of-year expectations defined by The Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards: 4-Years Old to Kindergarten (2017). The valuable assessment information is used so that teachers can adjust instruction to meet your child's changing needs as well as to communicate to you about your child's progress. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's progress you are encouraged to speak with your child's classroom teacher.

Dress Code

Schools adhere to dress code policies as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct (www.manateeschools.net), so please ask your child's school what types of clothing are allowed or if a uniform is required. Our curriculum encourages active learning. Children will work with paint, sand, water, and many other types of materials. Children will also play outside daily and should wear clothing that is comfortable, along with closed-toe shoes.

Snack

Teachers may use snack time as a vehicle to engage children in fun learning tasks. All snacks must follow the Smart Snack Nutritional Guidelines as outlined in the school district's policy 5.13 (www.manateeschools.net).

Outdoor Exploration

Children are provided daily time to run, play, and explore outside. Outdoor play opportunities are essential to growth, development, and learning. Our program offers unstructured play opportunities as well as outdoor explore stations which are specifically designed to provoke children's curiosity about a curriculum topic they are currently investigating in their classroom. Children choose which activities to engage in during outdoor exploration. Teachers play with children to encourage physical, social, and cognitive development and assess students' growth in these areas.

Quiet Time

The Early Learning Family and Support Team's guidelines regarding nap time or quiet time in pre-kindergarten programs are aligned with the latest research in this area. All students in our pre-kindergarten classrooms are offered a time during the day that allows them to quietly rest or relax. Children are not required to nap during quiet time. All children are provided with activities which encourage individual, quiet play and learning at their mats during quiet time. This allows all children time for unstructured rest but does not require children to sleep if they are not tired.



Family Engagement-Be A VIP!

VIP's are Very Involved Parents who support their child's learning in our Pre-Kindergarten Programs.

Our PreK Programs emphasize the key relationship between child, parent, and the learning environment. Research has shown that the most significant influences on children's lives come from their home and especially from parents, who are their child's primary teachers.

Our PreK Programs provide opportunities for parents to gain confidence as the prime educators of their children by acquiring further knowledge and understanding of child growth and development. Information and guidance are also available about community resources for families seeking additional support.

You and your family are a valued part of our program. Teachers will communicate with you frequently through informal conversations, or in writing. Teachers are also interested in family concerns and home events. We encourage you to share any information about your child's life or activities that will help us provide a supportive and exciting program.

The Early Learning and Family Support team holds various family activities throughout the year. You will be informed of these events by your teacher. Family involvement in the program is highly encouraged and a large part of our program. By being actively involved with your child and his/her peers, you will serve as a positive role model. We encourage you to volunteer. Families can participate in many ways such as classroom activities, helping plan or implement special events, sharing your expertise, etc. Please note the following guidelines:

- It is a Manatee School District policy that anyone volunteering or participating in school activities must complete a Volunteer Application. Volunteer applications are available on-line at <http://www.manateeschools.net>.*
- When you are volunteering in your child's classroom, you will not be permitted to bring other siblings or children with you.*
- For the safety of all children, you must obtain a visitor's pass from the school office before entering your child's classroom.*

Throughout the school year we offer many opportunities for families to be involved in the prekindergarten classroom. We want to get to know families so we can support the children in our classrooms as best we can and in whatever way we can.

Your child will become excited about the school when you show excitement and support. Be enthusiastic, talk with your child about all the exciting activities in PreK. Ask your child's PreK teacher about ways to support and extend this special year of learning, and what educational activities you and your child can do at home.

Become a VIP! (Very Involved Parent!)



EARLY LEARNING AND FAMILY SUPPORT EVALUATION CENTER

The Early Learning and Family Support Evaluation Center offers developmental screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations and consultation service for young children suspected of having delays or disabilities. The Early Learning and Family Support Evaluation Center screens and evaluates pre-kindergarten children who are not enrolled in public school. These services help to identify a child's educational needs and determine if they qualify for special education services through the School District of Manatee County.

All services are free and available to qualifying children. The Early Learning and Family Support Evaluation Center is available to any child 3-5 years old and living in Manatee County.

Developmental Screenings

Parents or others may notice concerning behaviors or a lack of skills unlike other children of the same age. A developmental screening may be helpful in determining if the child is experiencing a problem in one or more areas of development. That may include fine or gross motor skills, language understanding and use, speech, or problem-solving skills. Developmental screenings are conducted by a Child Find Specialist from Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FLDRS)

Multi-Disciplinary Evaluations

Multi-Disciplinary Evaluations can help determine if young children suspected of having delays or disabilities qualify for special education services before kindergarten. Depending on the child's needs, one or more of the following evaluations could be scheduled:

- Speech/Language
- Developmental (cognitive or behavioral)
- Social Work
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Vision & Hearing

Parent Involvement

Parent participation is a very important and necessary part of the evaluation process.

Parents will:

- Provide consent for evaluation and permission to obtain records.
- Share concerns and perspectives.
- Possess expert knowledge about what their child can and cannot do.
- Participate in the evaluations and conference.

For additional information call
The Early Learning and Family Support Evaluation Center at 941-721-2300

VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN (VPK)

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SDMC VPK Locations and Programs

*VPK school sites are subject to change based on specific school enrollment and unit allocations.

VPK AM (Free) 8:30-11:30 AM

VPK PLUS Parent Pay (\$300 month) 8:30 AM-3:20 PM

Anna Maria Elementary

Bashaw Elementary

Braden River Elementary

Freedom Elementary

Johnson K-8

Kinnan Elementary

Lakewood Ranch High (8:00 AM-2:00 PM)

McNeal Elementary

Miller Elementary

Mills Elementary

Myakka Elementary

Palma Sola Elementary

Stewart Elementary

Tara Elementary

Williams Elementary

Willis Elementary

Witt Elementary

VPK Plus Migrant/Title I (Free)

All-Day Program 8:30 AM-3:20 PM

Abel Elementary

Ballard Elementary

Bayshore Elementary

Blackburn Elementary

Manatee Elementary

Palmetto Elementary

Prine Elementary

Samoset Elementary

Sea Breeze Elementary

VPK Plus

To complement the VPK program, the school district also offers extended day opportunities:

VPK Plus Parent Pay:

VPK Plus Parent Pay provides a seamless seven-hour day. After VPK hours (8:30-11:30 AM) parents can choose to have their child stay until the end of the school day (3:20 PM). This program is a fee-based program. Fees include nine monthly payments of \$300 (Sept. – May) and a \$30 registration fee. VPK Parent Pay schools are: Bashaw, Braden River, Freedom, Kinnan, Lakewood Ranch High School (8-2 PM), McNeal, Miller, Mills, Myakka, Palma Sola, Stewart, Tara, Johnson K-8, Williams, Willis and Witt. *(Subject to change based on specific school enrollment and unit allocations).*

VPK Plus Title I:

VPK Plus Title I provides a seamless seven-hour day. This federally funded program is offered at no cost to families; however, families must live within a Title 1 attendance zone. After VPK hours (8:30-11:30 AM) parents can choose to have their child stay until the end of the school day (3:20 PM) free of charge. Title 1 VPK school sites include: Abel, Ballard, Bayshore, Blackburn, Manatee EI, Palmetto EI, Prine, Samoset, Sea Breeze and Tillman. *(Subject to change based on specific school enrollment and unit allocations).*

VPK Plus Parent Pay Fee Guidelines

For families choosing to enroll in a full day program at a VPK Plus Parent Pay school, there is an annual fee for the afternoon program (11:30-3:20 PM) of \$2,700, divided into nine monthly payments of \$300 (Sept. – May).

1. All fees are due in advance, by the first Friday of each month. Each month parent(s)/guardian(s) will receive an electronic invoice via email. If payment is not made by the first Friday of each month a \$10.00 late fee will be assessed.
2. If payment is late the student's schedule will be changed to the 3-hour VPK AM program. A notice of the schedule change will be sent home via email or with the student. Consistent late payment can result in dismissal from the program.
3. There is a \$30 non-refundable registration fee.
4. Each payment must be made online through the District Payment Portal:
<https://manateeschools.revtrak.net/>
5. School staff and teachers will not be able to accept payments. All payments must be made online through the portal.
6. When enrolling in the VPK Plus Parent Pay program, parent(s)/guardian(s) must sign a "Parent Handbook Acknowledgement" confirming that all payments will be made in a timely manner.
7. Credits are not issued for a students' absences. The full monthly fee must be paid even when a student is absent.
8. The school district is not permitted to extend credit; therefore, all services must be paid for in advance. Parents must be responsible for advance payment of the VPK Plus Parent Pay full day services. Students will be excluded from the full day program for non-payment.

VPK Choice

VPK Choice is an opportunity for parents to select the school site and program that will best meet their child's needs. Choice requests will be prioritized according to the following criteria:

1. Applicant is choosing their zoned school or a school within their school zone cluster.
2. Children who are 4 yrs. of age by September 1st of the academic year. (Children with VPK delayed enrollment certificates are not eligible for placement in a school district VPK program.)
3. Applicant has a sibling(s) currently attending the requested school.
4. Parent is currently in active military duty.

5. Parent is currently employed by the School District of Manatee.
6. The child is considered to be homeless.
7. The child is in foster care or protective services.
8. The child has migrant status.

*All other applicants will be placed in the choice pool for random placement.

Choice applications are not processed using a first-come, first-served basis during the Choice period. Applicants will be notified by email about placement and the procedures for school enrollment.

Parents who do not receive their choice option for VPK may contact the Early Learning Family and Support Team's VPK Department at (941) 753-0958 to be placed on a waiting list.

After the VPK Choice Period:

Any student applying for VPK outside of the choice period will be placed based upon capacity at the school and on a first-come, first-served basis.

VPK Attendance

Although it is voluntary for your child to enroll in a VPK program, it is NOT voluntary for your child to attend. It is expected that your child will be on time and in school every day unless there is an excused absence (see Student Code of Conduct and academic calendar at manateeschools.net). If your child has more than three absences, excused or not excused, and/or tardies per month, your child may be removed from the program.

All absences must be documented. Parents are required to sign and date a monthly attendance certification form and teachers are required to maintain them for auditing purposes.

Late Pick-Up Fees: It is expected that your child will be picked up promptly at the end of the instructional day. If a parent is tardy in picking up his/her child after dismissal time, a late pick-up fee will be charged. Parents will be assessed a \$12 late fee for every 15 minutes past the end of the day. A student may be withdrawn from the program if there are repetitive late pick-ups.

VPK Student Behavior and Discipline Policy

PreK teachers design classroom environments that support healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development. The Early Learning and Family Support team collaborates with teachers and paraprofessionals to support student behavior and development with attention to self-regulation, appropriate emotional expression, relationship development and developing independence. In partnership with parents, we value modeling and reinforcing behaviors that are safe and appropriate in a variety of situations.

Our team embraces the program Conscious Discipline (Becky Bailey) as the foundational framework for behavioral support and social emotional development prioritizing students' safety and security within stimulating learning environments. Teachers recognize that relationships are essential for learning, and they intentionally design environments and foster interactions so that students are in healthy connected relationships with adults and peers. With the essential foundation of routines, rituals, and structures in place, PreK students thrive.

In some cases, a student may continue to display disruptive or unsafe behaviors even with these foundational components in place. For those students, PreK teachers implement the following progressive discipline plan to intensify support and/or reconsider placement:

Step One: Implement routines, rituals and structures based on Conscious Discipline and TAT's Rock Your Classroom, for all students. These create a safe and connected classroom environment for learning and problem solving.

If behavior continues or escalates...

Step Two: Notify the parents and school personnel about the behaviors and to develop a plan for intensifying behavioral support including documentation of behaviors and identifying support strategies.

If behavior continues or escalates...

Step Three: Teacher and/or parent recommends child for screening and evaluations. The evaluations will determine the process for further assessments or actions from school personnel.

***Important Note:** At any point in this process, if a child, parent, or caregiver's behavior excessively disrupts the learning of other students, causes damage to school property and/or is unsafe to self or others, the child's placement may be reconsidered. This includes shortening the child's daily schedule or withdrawing the child from the VPK Program. All students enrolled in the Manatee County School District must adhere to the Student Code of Conduct which states:

MISCONDUCT THAT MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINE

Students are expected to behave during the time you are at school, at school activities, ... Students may be disciplined if they do anything during those times or attempt to do anything that violates a school rule or that may:

- Hurt, harass, or threaten others.
- Damage property.
- Disrupt class, school, or a school activity.
- Be dishonest or
- Violate a criminal law or state statute.

See SDMC Student Code of Conduct at www.manateeschools.net

VPK Transportation

Transportation is not provided for students in the VPK program. Parents must make arrangements to bring their children to school and pick them up on a timely basis. Some school locations offer before and after school care.

VPK Personal Care and Toileting Issues:

Children who are enrolled in the VPK program are expected to be toilet trained. Please contact the school if there are medical issues that require accommodation. The MCSD complies with all state statutes including the requirements of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Our Qualified VPK Teachers and Staff:

Every classroom follows a state approved VPK curriculum and students are taught by specially trained and/or certified teachers who are assisted by talented paraprofessionals. Each classroom will be staffed with one teacher and one teacher aide for every 18 to 20 students.

VPK Parent Handbook Acknowledgement

In order to conserve resources, schools will not distribute paper copies of the parent handbook to every student. An electronic copy of the Parent Handbook is available on the District website at: <https://www.manateeschools.net>
 If you require a paper copy of the parent handbook, one should be available in the front office of your child's school. If there is not an available copy at the school, please check the box below and one will be sent to you.

- I would like to have a printed copy of the parent handbook.

VPK PARENT HANDBOOK

This parent handbook has been developed to provide our students and families information on the policies and expectations for VPK in the School District of Manatee County. Parents are encouraged to review the parent handbook and partner with us as we begin your child's formal educational journey.

FAILURE TO REVIEW THE PARENT HANDBOOK WILL NOT RELIEVE A STUDENT OR PARENT/GUARDIAN OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THE POLICIES OR ACCOUNTABILITY FOR LOSS OR DAMAGE TO SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MANATEE COUNTY PROPERTY.

I have read, understood and agree to the School District of Manatee County VPK Parent Handbook:

VPK Attendance Policy (pg.10) Initials

If your child has more than three unexcused absences and/or tardies per month, your child may be removed from the program. All absences must be documented. Parents are required to sign and date a monthly attendance certification form and teachers are required to maintain them for auditing purposes.

Late Pick-Up Fees: It is expected that your child will be picked up promptly at the end of the instructional day. If a parent is tardy in picking up his/her child after dismissal time, a late pick-up fee will be charged. Parents will be assessed a \$12 late fee for every 15 minutes past the end of the day. A student may be withdrawn from the program if there are repetitive late pick-ups.

Personal Care and Toileting Issues (pg.11) Initials

Children who are enrolled in the VPK program are expected to be toilet trained. Please contact the school if there are medical issues that require accommodations. The SDMC complies with all state statues including the requirements of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

VPK Discipline Policy (pg.10) Initials

We recognize that positive discipline teaches and encourages healthy social and emotional development. If a child is having difficulty in this area, the parent (guardian) and teacher will work together on meeting the needs of the child and the classroom. All Manatee County students must adhere to the SDMC Student Code of Conduct, if there is a pattern of extreme and disruptive behavior the child may be withdrawn from the program

By placing your signature below, you are confirming that you have read, understood and agree to policies and expectations in the parent handbook.

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

Child's Name

School