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**Parent Handbook**

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**Philosophy and Curriculum**

STEMsteps promotes an environment of inquiry-based learning and employs children’s natural desire of questioning the world around them to engage students in a variety of real-world learning experiences and activities. STEMsteps mission is to help children develop a life-long love for learning and increase students’ academic self-concept. The emphasis on intellectual learning, rather than rote learning, encourages students to make broader connections and develop critical thinking skills. To achieve this, STEMsteps integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math curriculums seamlessly with the Arts.

**Curriculum**

STEMsteps believes strongly in the *eight indicators of a quality prek-3 curriculum* provided by the *National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) :*

* *Children are active and engaged*
* *Goals are clear and shared by all*
* *Curriculum is evidence-based*
* *Valued content is learned through investigation, play, and focused, intentional teaching*
* *Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences*
* *Curriculum is comprehensive*
* *Professional standards validate the curriculum’s subject-matter content*
* *Research and other evidence indicates that the curriculum, if implemented as intended, will likely have beneficial effects*

(as cited in EDC, 2013, p. 2-3)

STEM STEPS offers a child-centered, STEM focused curriculum utilizing project-based learning activities. Reading and Language Arts are integrated seamlessly utilizing a variety of texts, student journals, along with phonics and phonemic awareness activities.

PA CORE- STEM STEPS utilizes PA CORE standards to develop curriculum maps and guide instructional planning. STEM STEPS teachers use a variety of ongoing assessment to adjust instruction to student’s needs and learning interests.

**Staff Qualifications**

As a dual-licensed school and childcare, STEMsteps follows the guidelines set forth by Pennsylvania Code and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) for staff qualifications. As a private academic school, STEMsteps teachers have appropriate teaching certifications and bachelor’s degrees from qualifying institutions.

**Toddler Teachers**

STEMsteps Toddler teachers are either certified teachers or a combination of teachers’ assistants/aides. A teacher’s aide with two years’ experience or a Bachelor’s degree in human services field and experience, meets the qualifications to supervise these age groups

**Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers**

STEMsteps preschool teachers are certified in teaching Private Nursery School, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education or hold Dual licensure in Special Education/Early Childhood. Preschool teachers obtained bachelor’s degrees, through accredited institutions of higher education, and hold valid teaching certificates. Kindergarten teachers are hold valid Pennsylvania certificates for teaching and master’s degrees in their field.

**Teachers Assistants/Aides**

 Teachers Assistants at STEMsteps are graduates of an approved 2-year college or university having specialized in child development, early childhood, or elementary education. Teachers’ Aides are at least 18 years old and are always under direct instruction of teachers.

**Staff Members**

STEMsteps staff members are at least 18 years old and are high school graduates, have 2 years’ experience working with children or hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or a Certified Childcare Professional (CCP) credential.

**Confidentiality**

STEMsteps keeps individual records for all students enrolled. Records include, but are not limited to emergency contact information, authorized pick up persons, student medical records, attendance, and academic records. Child records are confidential and shall be stored in a locked cabinet. A facility person may not disclose information concerning a child or family, except in the course of inspections and investigations by agents of the Department. All permanent records will be destroyed through shredding, six months after completion of the program.

**Communication**

STEMsteps believes that effective communication is key to building a strong community relationship and a successful school. STEMsteps communicates to parents and the greater community through stemstepspa.com, social media, and direct newsletters through Brightwheel. In the goal of staying “green” we want you to know that we try not to send a lot of papers home. Both parents need to have Brightwheel app and alerts turned on. All communication is done via Brightwheel. STEMsteps encourages feedback and communication from parents and the community as well. Please feel free to email, stop in, or turn a written note or suggestion into the drop box on the Director’s door. If you need to update your child’s drop-off or pick-up person, please do so on Brightwheel and contact the Director.

**Admissions**

STEMsteps is a private school and childcare and accepts all applications for enrollment. A $150 registration fee will apply for all new student applications. Returning students will pay a $75 returning registration fee, each academic year they enroll. Additional enrollments per family will be charged at $50 per enrollee. Students will be accepted on a first come first serve basis. However, full time enrollment and students with siblings enrolled are considered prior to part-time enrollment and non-sibling enrolled students. Once accepted into the program, you have 30 days to complete any remaining paperwork and turn it in. Failure to complete the proper forms for enrollment will void your acceptance into the program. After all spots are filled, students may be placed on a waiting list for admittance if openings arise. Upon enrollment, the director should be privy to any information regarding a child’s diagnosis, behaviors, and any other concerns about the child.

**Nondiscriminatory Policy**

Admissions, the provisions of services, and referrals of clients shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin (including limited English proficiency), age, or sex.

Program services shall be made accessible to eligible persons with disabilities through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limited to, equipment redesign, the provision of aides, and the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods.

Any individual/client/patient/student (and /or their guardian) who believes they have been discriminated against, may file a complaint of discrimination with:

STEMsteps

3281 Wexford Rd.

Gibsonia, PA 15044

Office for Civil Rights

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Centralized Case Management Operations

200 Independence Avenue, S.W.

Room 509F HHH Bldg

Washington, D.C. 20201

Customer Response Center: (800) 368-1019

TDD: (800) 537-7697

https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints

Email: ocrmail@hhs.gov

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Department of Human Services

Bureau of Equal Opportunity

Room 225, Health & Welfare Building

P.O. Box 2675 Harrisburg, PA 17120

Inquiries: (717) 787-1127

Email: RA-PWBEOAO@pa.gov

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC)

333 Market Street, 8th Floor

Harrisburg, PA 17101

https://www.phrc.pa.gov/File-a-complaint

Inquiries: (717) 787-4410

TTY users only: (717) 787-7279

**Tuition**

STEMsteps charges tuition on a yearly basis. Tuition is paid annually or every four weeks depending on the plan you select. Annual payments will receive a 2% discount. There are 10 payments for the school year only program. There are 2 additional payments for the summer program.

Siblings are eligible for a 10% discount on the lower annual tuition. The tuition plan accounts for holiday breaks and time off throughout the year. This rate is constant and does not change month to month. Therefore, the tuition is due regardless of the days STEMsteps is closed. Days cannot be made-up if missed due to illness or vacation (see Illness/Vacation Policy below for more information).

If you are experiencing financial difficulties or get behind on your payments, please contact a director to set up a payment plan. If you do not try to set up payment arrangements and you have a balance over 15 days past due, you will be asked to keep your child at home until a payment arrangement is determined and set.

All families are required to set up auto withdrawal for tuition payments via Brightwheel. Tuition is paid the 15th prior to the start month. First tuition payment is paid the 15th of August and billing starts the first week of school. Billing is per every 4 weeks after that. Tuition is non-refundable once paid. You must give a 30 day notice if leaving the program. If your child attends 50% of the billing period and any unforeseen circumstances occurs, no refunds will be granted.

**Late Fees**

Invoices are generated automatically along with fees associated with drop-in care, late pick up or arrival, and late tuition fees.

Please pay promptly to avoid late fees. Tuition is considered late if not paid by the end of the business day on the 20th of each payment period. The fees are added as follows:

Annual Payments, $75/month

Monthly Payments, $50/month

**Drop-in Enrollment**

Drop-in care must be approved by a director 24 hours in advance of the drop in and are subject to availability. Drop-in care will be billed on the day they occur, and the bill will be due within five business days. If drop-in time is not paid in full, a 20% late fee on the remaining balance will be assessed on the following months tuition along with the past due amount. Drop-in care will not be allowed if your account has an unpaid balance or if the school is full. If you are dropping in for before or afterschool care and it exceeds 50% of the days you are enrolled, you will be billed the full day tuition rate rather than daily charges. Drop in care charges are $55 per day.

**Re-Enrollment**

A re-enrollment fee is required for each current family for the following school year. This fee is due when re-enrollment forms are submitted. This fee is non-refundable, except in cases in which the student is not accepted for re-enrollment. The re-enrollment fee is $75.

All enrollment forms for the school year are due by March 15.

**Required Forms for Enrollment**

STEMsteps will require all families to complete: child health report, emergency contact form, photography consent, agreement, and OTC and topical form. For the State of Pennsylvania and STEMsteps records, the following must be kept on file and updated on time. We will request signatures online through Enrollsy when your form expires.

Kindergarten Registration Requirements: Private school dental and health exam along with proof of citizenship (birth certificate) must be sent in.

Parents are requires to put in all emergency contacts, allergy information, and all other pertinent information in Brightwheel.

**Immunizations**

**Current immunizations WILL be required for entry**. Non vaccinated children pose a risk to young toddlers who are not fully vaccinated yet. Therefore, if vaccines are not current, they may not enroll. This means that religious and moral exemptions will not be accepted (unless it’s for the flu shot). Please supply updated immunization records each time you visit the doctor to be immunized. This can be done by asking your pediatrician for a printed child health report for childcare or by bringing the form with you to the doctors to complete.

If you are not planning on obtaining the flu shot for your child, please write a letter to place in your child’s file, that you object due to moral or religious obligations.

**What to Bring**

Older toddlers may bring a small blanket, small pillow, and **one** soft toy to keep in their classroom. Staff members will message you when your child is running low on diapers and/or wipes. A change of clothing is required to keep at school for ALL students. Toddler bins for diapers and clothes and rest time, are in the classroom. There are no binkys or bottles allowed in the building.

Preschool, kindergarten prep, and kindergarten bins for clothing are in the rear of the facility, in the girl’s restroom. If your child is not fully toilet trained, you are responsible for providing diapers or pull-ups and wipes. Please check your child’s bin weekly if you supply diapers/wipes and seasonally if your child has extra clothes here. It is important that the clothes here are seasonally appropriate and fit your child. If your child does not have a change of clothes and their clothes become soiled- you will be contacted to pick them up from school or bring a change immediately. Kindergarten students will need to bring an appropriately sized backpack for transporting papers to and from school, specifically for bus riders. Communication centers will be available for you to pick up your child’s work each day, as backpacks and bags are only permitted for rest time supplies and Kindergarten students.

Please send your child with appropriate jackets, gloves, hats, etc. for the weather as we do go outside daily when it is above 30 degrees. Donations of items such as tissues, hand sanitizing wipes, clorox wipes, glue sticks, pencils, and craft supplies are always welcome but are not necessary to send in with your child as these items are provided.

**Food at STEMsteps**

All students are required to pack a lunch daily. We require students to have a BENTGO lunch box. This way all items are ready to be eaten when the box is open. Please bring in a labeled water bottle as well. Water is the only acceptable drink, unless discussed with the director. Please pack fresh fruit and veggies. A small treat or chocolate is allowed. If there is an allergy in the classroom, the director will notify you. All lunches are placed in the refrigerators, so no need to pack ice packs.

Adventurous Play and Risk Taking

At STEMsteps we believe that adventurous, highly physical play adds to a child’s overall development. This type of play helps children to develop self-regulation and a sensitivity to others. Children practice problem-solving and experience cause and effect. They develop and refine their nervous system and strengthen overall physical wellness. While we believe that experiences with appropriate risks are necessary, your child’s safety and well-being are our greatest concerns. Staff are trained in the supervision and support of this vigorous, challenging play. Our outdoor and indoor environments have safe surfaces to reduce the risk of injury during adventurous play. And we teach children how to listen to and trust their own bodies. Consider dressing your child in clothes that are durable and can get wet and dirty. Our children play outside in all types of weather at all times of the year (Carlson 2011).

**Arrival and Dismissal**

For your child's safety, you and your child must greet the staff on duty together and you must sign in/out at the tablet kiosk. Please wait until the staff acknowledges your presence. The staff could be preoccupied with another child and not be aware that she has the responsibility for your child. This applies to all children including school-age children. Our responsibility begins when we have made parent and child contact. Upon arrival the staff will also be assessing the wellness of your child while you are still present. If at the time the staff observes that the child is not well, you will be there to take your child home.

School day students may be dropped off between 8:45 and 9:00am. Parents must enter the facility using their secure code. Please do not use this time to have lengthy conversations with your child’s teacher. Your child’s teacher is responsible for keeping his/her eyes on the children and preparing for the day’s activities. If you need to discuss something, please send a message on brightwheel to set up a time for a phone or face-to-face meeting with your child’s teacher.

Please be considerate that we begin circle time in all classrooms around 9:20am. If you are late, your child is missing an important time of the day and interrupting other children from learning. If your child arrives after 9:15am, they are considered tardy for the day. **After two unexcused tardy, you will be charged a $10 late fee per late.** Please sign your child out using the app at the desk and pick up your child from their classroom directly. If a parent/guardian is not picking up their child, a pick-up form must be on file stating that the said person is allowed to take their child home.Toddlers and Preschoolers who have a difficult time at drop off will be asked to set up a goodbye routine and stick to it. A goodbye routing consists of a ritual you and your child do together and then you will hand your child directly to the teacher without lingering. This is important to decrease negative behaviors at drop off time and make the transition easier for you and your child. Be sure to discuss with your child at home that you will always return for them and you will see them later. Practice leaving your child with other family members and caregivers using the same routine.

After-School program runs 3:30-5pm Monday- Friday at the Gibsonia location. Only 10 students can enter the afterschool program.

**Vacations, Switching Days**

All families enrolled in the academic program receive vacation time based on scheduled enrollment. You can use your days to cover illness or vacations and can be deducted from the following months payment plan.

Please submit a written request via Brightwheel message. Your average daily rate will be deducted when utilizing vacation days. Please submit your vacation request two weeks in advance when able.

STEMsteps plans enrollment to maximize space for all children. Therefore, there is not an availability to change enrollment. If your program is no longer feasible for your family, please contact the director to discuss program options.

**Extended Closures**

If the program is closed for an extended period due to natural disasters or public health related emergencies, the Board of Directors will approve any refunds that may be issued to families. The maximum amount that may be approved is 50% of monthly program tuition for up to two months.

**Illness**

Maintaining health and preventing the spread of contagious diseases are responsibilities shared by parents, our staff, and STEMsteps. Our staff is training in illness-prevention practices that limit spread of infections. The use of gloves during diaper changing and the employment of the proper cleansing agents, help in reducing the spread of infections Parents must have their children immunized against major diseases, including but not limited to: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, Haemophilus influenzae type b disease (HIB), polio-myelitis, measles, mumps, reubella and chicken pox according to the latest recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the United States Public Health Service (unless exempted for religious or medical reasons). If you have any questions, you should call the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of pediatrics (ECELS) at (800) 243-2357 and they will contact your family physician to review the requirements.

STEMsteps employs procedures for reporting exposures, identifying an ill child, and informing the parent of a child's illness. Parents are responsible for providing up-to-date emergency phone numbers, promptly picking up their ill child, and consulting with their child's doctor about diagnosis and care. Parents must inform the center when their child is ill with a contagious disease and should request their pediatrician's cooperation in consulting with the center if the illness has implications for the entire childcare program. See COVID-19 Screening Tool In Appendix A.

***Recognizing Sick Children:***

The child care staff and parents need to recognize the signs and symptoms of illness in children. Fever is a well-known symptom that the parent or our staff use to identify a child who may be ill. Fever (a rise in the body temperature above normal) is common in young children and is rarely harmful. There are many causes of fever other than illness. Exercise, environmental conditions, individual variation and teething may raise the body temperature. However, fever may be a symptom of a contagious or serious illness.

Some children with fever will not be admitted to the program until the child is examined by a health professional. Such children include any child with a temperature of 100.7°F or greater.

Parents will be notified promptly when their child is found to have a fever while at the center and must pick up their child within thirty (30) minutes of notification. Failure to do so will require the center director to contact another emergency contact person or transport your child to an emergency room.

The child's response to fever-reducing medicines (e.g., acetaminophen) is not helpful in deciding how sick the child is. Regardless of the presence or height of fever, it is how sick a child looks or acts that is important. Have your doctor check your child with symptoms or signs of a possibly serious illness (unusual drowsiness, fussiness, persistent or excessive crying, wheezing, uncontrolled coughing, difficulty breathing) or who refuses to play or complains of severe pain.

The child must be fever-free for 24 hours without medication, prior to returning to the center.

***Inclusion/Exclusion from the Child Care Center***

Most children with mild contagious illness do not need to stay home from childcare. Usually, the child has already exposed others before seeming sick. Other illnesses (e.g., impetigo, conjunctivitis) stop being contagious shortly after treatment is started. Guidelines depend on the specific diagnosis or symptom (see below). Therefore, there is no reason to exclude mildly ill children or those being treated unless:

They have been exposed to a person in the household who tested positive for COVID-19.

The child does not feel well enough to participate comfortably in the usual activities. The center staff and/or the center director will make the decision as to whether to exclude your child from the center.

The staff cannot care for the sick child without interfering with the care of other children. Again, the decision to exclude your child from the program will be at the discretion of the childcare staff and/or center director.

The child has any of the following:

fever and behavior changes or other signs or symptoms of illness as defined under "Recognizing Ill Children" until the child's inclusion is checked with a health professional who determines that the child may be in child care;

the child has signs of symptoms of a possible serious illness as defined under "Recognizing Ill Children" until the child is checked by a health professional who determines that the child may be in child care;

uncontrolled diarrhea (stool runs out of the diaper or the child can't get to the toilet in time);

vomiting in the previous 24 hours until the vomiting stops or a health professional determines that the child may be in child care;

mouth sores with drooling, unless a health professional determines the child's illness is not from communicable illness;

rash with fever or behavior change until a health professional determines that the child may be in child care;

pink eye with white or yellow discharge until 24 hours after treatment is started;

scabies, head lice or other infestation until 24 hours after treatment is started and the child is nit-free;

As tuition is based on program enrollment, not attendance, there will be no refunds or make-up days offered for school missed due to illnesses.

**Inclement Weather Policy**

Parents will not be refunded for missed days due to weather-related closures. Tuition is based on enrollment rather than attendance; therefore, the tuition rate is constant. STEMsteps takes into consideration severity of the weather and surrounding school closures before closing for the day. Kindergarten student will follow their home-school district for busing delays. If STEMsteps does close, an all-alert will be issued directly through Brightwheel messaging and STEMsteps email.

**Invitations**

When sending invitations for birthdays and other occasions please invite your child’s entire class, OR all boys, OR all girls. This includes email invitations. Please do not pick and choose who you will invite as this makes other children feel left out when they arrive to school talking about it.

**Withdraw and Termination of Enrollment**

Termination Procedures:  Parent may terminate this Contract by submitting a WRITTEN Termination Notice to the Director by the dates indicated below (the Termination Date). Time is of the essence as to all deadlines stated in this Enrollment Contract.

The Termination Notice must (a) be dated, (b) state the Student’s name, (c) provide a reason for the termination of the Contract; and (d) be RECEIVED by the Director on or before the

Termination Date. If such Termination Notice is timely received, Parent will be relieved of all tuition paid and other payments and fees that would have come due after the Termination Date. Even if this Contract is terminated pursuant to the terms of this Paragraph, Parent understands that the School will not refund any portion of the Student’s application or registration fees, unless they are not accepted.

Withdraw. If you must withdraw from the program, a four-week advanced written notice is required. You will be responsible any tuition payments during the four-week withdraw period. Early withdraw is subject to full payment of tuition for the remainder of the contract. If there is an extenuating circumstance, please explain in your withdraw letter to the directors.

STEMsteps reserves the right to terminate enrollment at any time if any of the following policies are violated:

1. If you hire, or offer a position to, a current employee of STEMsteps to perform childcare services for you in your home.
2. If you hire a former employee to perform work or childcare services, prior to six months of their termination date.
3. If your child has been placed on a behavior plan or recommended an evaluation from outside agencies and you have not followed through with implementation within the initial 90 day period.
4. Any excessive instances of bullying, threatening, self-harm, or harming others. This includes hitting, punching, kicking, tripping, intimidation, throwing of toys and spitting.

Appendix



**Childcare Health Assessment**

Please complete and sign this form each time you visit the doctor and return to staff member at STEMsteps.

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