



STEMsteps

Parent Handbook

Table of Contents

Philosophy and Curriculum.....3

Staff Qualifications.....4

Confidentiality.....4

Communication..... 4

Admissions..... 5

Tuition and Fees.....6

Required Forms for Enrollment7

Immunizations.....7

What to Bring..... 7

Food at STEMsteps..... 8

Adventurous Play.....8

Arrival and Dismissal.....9

Before and After School Care.....10

Late Pick Up Procedures and Late Pick Up Fees..... 10-11

Illness, Vacations, Switching Days.....11

Extended Closures.....11

Inclement Weather Policy.....12

Invitations..... 12

Withdrawal and Termination Policies.....12- 13

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.

Infant and Toddler Teachers

STEMsteps Infant and 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 emailed home. In the goal of staying "green" we want you to know that we try not to send a lot of papers home. Please check your email and add our email to your contacts to stay informed. 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 at the main entrance. If you need to

update your child's drop-off or pick-up person, please do so online, on paper forms, and via note or email to the directors.

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.

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

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Human Services
Bureau of Equal Opportunity
Room 225, Health & Welfare Building
P.O. Box 2675
Harrisburg, PA 17110

PA Human Relation Commission
Pittsburgh Regional Office
301 Fifth Avenue
Suite 390, Piatt Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Human Services
Bureau of Equal Opportunity
Western Regional Office
301 Fifth Avenue
Suite 410, Piatt Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-1210

U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
Office for Civil Rights
Suite 372, Public Ledge Building
150 South Independence Mall West
Philadelphia, PA 19106-9111

Tuition

STEMsteps charges tuition on a yearly basis. Tuition is paid annually, bi-annually, or monthly depending on the plan you select. Annual payments will receive a 2% discount, bi-annual payments will receive a 1% discount.

Siblings are eligible for a 10% discount on the lower annual tuition. Two siblings enrolled full time, full day receive and additional 5% discount each.

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 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.

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 and Bi-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 accrue at the rate of \$10 per hour.

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, if paid by February 28th. The fee is \$125 if paid after March 1st or later. The fee is per family not per child.

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

Required Forms for Enrollment

STEMsteps will be utilizing Enrollsy for enrollment forms. This will automatically populate student information into forms needed for enrollment. Please be as detailed as possible and be sure to provide proper immunization dates, medical and allergy information. Once the information is submitted, payment is made via Enrollsy and automatic billing is set.

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: In addition to Enrollsy forms required Proof of citizenship (birth certificate) must be sent in.

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

In the infant room, parents shall provide all necessary items. Including, but not limited to, diapers, medicated creams, wipes, formula/milk, bottles, snacks, baby food jars/containers, extra

labeled clothes, blanket, a crib sheet, a labeled diaper bag, and any teething toys/binky's. Each child will have a labeled bin for supplies in the classroom. Please provide a written schedule that your infant follows at home prior to the first day of enrollment.

Young and older toddlers may bring a small blanket, small pillow, and **one** soft toy to keep in their classroom. For young toddlers, (12-24 months), please also send in a "munchkin, miracle 360 cup". Please do not send bottles or milk, we provide water throughout the day and two servings of dairy through food. If your child receives breakfast at STEMsteps, they will receive a dairy serving or an almond or oat milk with breakfast. We recommend weaning from a pacifier between 6 and 12 months of age, before an emotional attachment can develop. However, no pacifiers will be allowed into school for any reason after 18 months of age. 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.

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. Young preschool students (ages 2.7-3.3) may bring a small soft animal or pillow in addition to a blanket for quiet time or rest time.

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, 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

Our food philosophy is to provide fresh, local and organic when available, food at the facility. We design a vegetarian menu that incorporates a variety of greens and vegetables, fruits, beans, dairy and whole grains. Food at STEMsteps is provided for children starting at 12 months. Infants 6 weeks to 12 months must supply their own milk and food. Currently, we are a peanut free facility and serve almond milk in place of cow's milk for breakfast only. We serve water to children during lunches and snacks. Please inform the directors of any allergy restrictions for your child upon enrollment.

A daily breakfast is served to students receiving morning care. STEMsteps will serve lunch and snack to all students enrolled in pre-school and kindergarten. Afternoon care students will

receive an additional snack. STEMsteps menu is available monthly and provided via email in advance of the month. STEMsteps meets all guidelines and regulations set forth by Pennsylvania Code for food regulations in a childcare setting and private nursery school. Students should not bring outside food into school unless there is a special need, which would be determined by the parents and directors prior to enrollment.

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. Specific to Infants/Toddlers: It is necessary for parent(s)/guardian(s) to communicate and update their child's daily form. The daily form is part of the check in process on the check in tablet. 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 9:20am, they are considered tardy for the day. **After three tardies, a \$10 charge will be incurred per late drop off.** If you arrive after 10:00am, you must have a doctor's excuse to attend that day. Pick up is from **2:55-3:10pm**. 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. If you are late in picking your child up or early in dropping off, after the second incident, the appropriate charge for hourly drop-in day care will be added to your monthly tuition for each occurrence. This hourly charge will accrue for each hour you are late in picking up, at 5 minutes after the hour. Therefore, after 4:05pm you will accrue two hours of drop-in care charged to your account and after 5:05 PM, three hours will be charged. This will be due within five days from the service date.

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 routine 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.

Students enrolled in before and after school programs may be dropped off and picked up at their times listed upon enrollment and between 7:05 and 5:55pm daily.

Before and After School Care

Students enrolled in before and after school care may be dropped off starting at 7:05am and picked up as late as 5:55pm. Keep in mind, we use the status forms you completed upon enrollment to schedule staff. Please approximate your drop off time as closely as possible so we can ensure proper staff coverage. If you need to drop off earlier than usual or stay later than expected, please message the staff immediately via Brightwheel messaging.

If you would like to drop-in for before or afterschool care, please give a minimum of 24-hour advance notice, to ensure a spot for your child. STEMsteps cannot guarantee last minute drop-in care is available (see Drop-In Enrollment).

Late child pickup procedure

STEMsteps closes at 5:55 p.m. Parents are asked to plan enough time to dress their child, collect the child's clothes, artwork, speak to a staff (if necessary) and leave the center by 5:55 p.m. If the parent/guardian is aware that they are going to be late, they should call the center to advise staff of this and of their plan to pick up their child/ren. Due to the operational and staffing costs incurred when a parent/guardian is late, a late fee will be charged.

When a child is not picked up by 5:55 p.m., staff will remain until the situation is resolved.

When the parent/guardian is late:

1. Contact the parent/guardian at the numbers on the child's file card
2. If contact with parent/guardian is not established, call the emergency contact(s) on the child's file card and plan for the child to be picked up.

3. Contact the Supervisor/designate and submit a Late Pick Up Form via Google Docs.
4. If the parents/guardians/emergency contact(s) are not available, and it is 7:00 pm; contact the appropriate Child Service Authorities and follow their instructions. Under no circumstances is the staff to remove the children from the school.

If the parent/guardian is repetitively late, staff will notify the Supervisor/designate who will meet with the parents/guardians regarding the situation.

Late Pick Up Fees

The late pick up fee schedule is as follows:

From 5:55 p.m. to 7 p.m. the fee for the first time late is \$1.00 per minute until 7 p.m. (maximum charge: \$65.)

The fee for the second time late is \$3.00 per minute until 7:00 p.m. (maximum charge: \$195) and any time late after that, the rate will be \$3.00 per minute.

If late three times in any seven-week period, the family faces removal from the school.

The tablet check-out clock is the time used to determine the late payment. Late fees not paid within 48 hours are added to your statement. (See Withdrawal policy for repeated lateness)

At 7 p.m., if we have not heard from you or we have not been able to reach you or your emergency contacts, we will call the appropriate local police authority and child services.

Illness, Vacations, Switching Days

STEMsteps understands that kids get sick. However, if your child is running a fever, they must be fever free for 24 hours before sending them back to school. If your child is feeling ill at school, the teacher or director will call home and assess the situation with the parent/guardian. If your child has uncontrolled diarrhea, suspicious rash, or fever over 99.8 you will be contacted to pick your child up. 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. However, all families enrolled in the academic program receive one week of 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 the vacation/illness request form located on our website, if you would like to utilize sick or vacation day deductions. 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.

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. The Termination Dates are as follows:

A. If the Student was enrolled by June 1st (prior to the start of the academic year applicable to this Contract), the Termination Notice in form stated above must be RECEIVED by June 15th (prior to the start of the academic year applicable to this Contract).

B. If the Student was enrolled after June 1st, but before June 30th (prior to the start of the academic year applicable to this Contract), the Termination Notice in form stated above must be received by the EARLIER of ten (10) days after payment of the application fee OR July 15th (prior to the start of the academic year applicable to this Contract), whichever occurs first.

C. If the Student is first enrolled on or after July 15th (prior to the start of the academic year applicable to this Contract), no termination option is available.

D. 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 and you have not followed through with implementation.
4. Any excessive instances of bullying, threatening, self-harm, or harming others.