

Grand Forks Head Start Program

Grand Forks Public School District



Parent/Guardian Handbook

Grand Forks Head Start
3600 6th Ave North, Door #3
Grand Forks, ND 58203
Phone: (701) 746-2433
Fax: (701) 746-2450

Welcome to Grand Forks Head Start

We are excited your child and family will be with us this year.



Our mission is to prepare children and empower families to be active participants, leaders, and advocates throughout life's educational journey.

Our school-wide expectations:

Be Safe

Be Kind

Be Responsible

**Grand Forks Head Start serves 154 children in Grand Forks County.
We have been a part of the Grand Forks School District since 1983.**

Head Start Locations:

Main Site (Lake Agassiz):	3600 6th Ave N	701-746-2433
Valley Senior Living at 42nd:	4000 24th Ave S	701-787-7816
Lewis & Clark Elementary:	1100 13th Ave S	701-787-4261
Ben Franklin Elementary:	1016 S 20th St	701-746-2250

Civil Rights: Public Notification

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Attendance

Head Start requires students maintain attendance of 90% or greater throughout the school year. The enrollment team meets monthly to address individual attendance concerns to ensure children have strong, daily attendance to benefit from our program. Head Start is mandated to make contact with families when a child is absent and the office or teacher has not been notified. **If your child will be absent, please call our automated attendance line at 701-746-2280.**

Daily Attendance Procedure (unexcused absence):

- Classroom staff will notify the office of unexcused absence within 45 minutes of program start time.
- Family Service staff will attempt to contact the parent/guardian.
- If prior contact has not been made with parent/guardian on day two, Family Service staff will attempt to make contact with the parent/guardian and the student's emergency contacts.
- If contact is not made by day three, Family Service staff will make a home visit.
- If contact is not made after the home visit attempt, the School Resource Officer will conduct a home visit along with Family Service staff.
- If no contact occurs, a certified letter will be mailed to the parent/guardian requesting they contact the school within two days of receiving the certified letter.
- After Head Start receives notice of receipt of certified letter, or return of letter, and no contact has been made by the parent/guardian, the child will be dropped and placed on the waitlist.

Child Pick-Up/Drop-Off

Drop-off – Classroom doors open at **8:00 am**. **Pick-up** – Class ends at **3:30 pm**. Children **MUST** be picked up by 3:30 pm. If a child is not picked up by **3:40 pm**, the following process will be initiated:

- Staff will contact parent/guardian to determine the status of pick up. If no contact is immediately made, staff will contact the student's emergency contacts.
- If an adult arrives after **3:45 pm**, a late form will be completed. After three late forms, the parent/guardian must meet with Family Services staff and the Director.
- If no contact is made with a parent/guardian or an emergency contact by **4:00 pm**, the Grand Forks Police Department will be contacted. A staff member will remain with the child until the police arrive.

Release of Child

Any person picking up a child must be on the authorization for release form and must be 18 years of age or older. Every authorized adult must present a photo identification at pick up. Head Start will not release a child to the parent/guardian or any adult who appears under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or is exhibiting threatening, abusive, or violent behavior that presents a potential for imminent danger to the child.

Cell Phone Use

ND law prohibits the use of electronic devices during school hours. Due to this law, phones are not to be used during drop off, pick up, or when visiting during school hours.

Custodial Issues

Head Start will honor a request by the custodial parent to deny access to their child within the limitations of a divorce decree or other court-ordered decree provided such court order is on file in the Head Start office.

Parent Concerns and Complaints

Head Start welcomes input from parents/guardians and the community regarding program policies and procedures to ensure we maintain a high quality program which meets the needs of the children, families, and communities we serve. A more formal process may be used to address concerns when a policy or procedure has been violated, or when the complainant does not feel satisfied with the response received. The Grievance Policy and steps for filing a formal grievance can be obtained from the Director.

Confidentiality

Our program will not disclose personally identifiable information regarding students and families without written consent. There are circumstances when our program must disclose confidential information as required by state or federal law, licensing or regulatory agencies, mandated reporting of child abuse or neglect, and emergency situations when disclosure is necessary to protect the health or safety of your child or others. Your child's records are maintained securely. Sensitive conversations will take place in person, by phone, or via secure communication platforms – not in the presence of other children, parents, or staff. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of enrolled children, parents/guardians, families and visitors may photograph or record only their own child during Head Start events.

Mandated Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect

All staff members are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect. In accordance with state and federal law, and Head Start Performance Standards, our staff are legally required to report any reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate child protection or law enforcement agency.

Mental Health Services

Head Start supports children's social, emotional, and behavioral well-being. Mental health consultation services are available to all enrolled children as a preventive and supportive resource. These services may include early identification of concerns, classroom observations, support for teachers with behavior strategies, collaboration with families and staff, and connections to resources when needed. We encourage you to reach out to your child's teacher if you have questions or feel additional support may be helpful.

Health and Mental Health Emergency Response

If a health or mental health emergency happens, staff will act right away to keep your child safe. This may include giving first aid, using calming strategies, or calling 911 if urgent medical care is needed. We will contact you immediately if:

- Your child needs emergency medical care
- Your child is seriously hurt or becomes very ill
- Your child is experiencing a serious emotional or behavioral crisis

If we cannot reach you, we will call the emergency contacts you provided. If your child needs to go to the emergency room or hospital, a staff member will stay with them until you arrive. Please make sure your phone numbers and emergency contacts are always up to date, and let us know about any health, mental health or behavioral concerns that could affect your child's safety. Please reach out if you would like a copy of our Health and Mental Health Emergency Response & Parent Communication Policy.

Illness

When groups of children come in close contact with one another they increase their chances of passing colds, flu, and other contagious conditions. Most children with mild illnesses can safely attend school. However, a child may be too sick to attend if:

- Child does not feel well enough to participate comfortably and/or falls asleep during classroom activities.
- Staff cannot adequately care for a child without compromising the care of other children.

Head Start Nurses have the right to decide if a child should be sent home.

If the child has any of the following **symptoms**, our policy requires we send your child home until they are well enough to attend or the illness is not contagious:

- **Fever** - Above 100 degrees orally, above 99 degrees under the arm or on the forehead, above 101 degrees rectally or tympanic. This does not include children who have a fever related to their immunizations.
- **Vomiting** - More than twice in the previous 24 hours. May return after 24 hours of no vomiting.
- **Diarrhea** - Changes from the child's usual stool pattern, increased frequency of stools or loose/watery stools. May return after 24 hours of no diarrhea episodes.
- **Rash** - With fever or behavior changes. Children with chickenpox should stay home until sores dry (5-7 days).
- **Mouth Sores** - With drooling.
- **Nasal Discharge** - Any green or yellow discharge persisting longer than three days or if accompanied by any of the following: fever, cough, shortness of breath, eye drainage, or ear pain.

Illness

If your child has any of the following **diagnoses** from a health provider, they can return to school as soon as they have been treated and/or is no longer contagious:

- **Infectious Conjunctivitis/Pink Eye** - Can return to school after antibiotic eye drops or ointment is started.
- **Scabies or other Infestations** - Can return to school after treatment is complete.
- **Head Lice** - If a student is found to have live lice, they will be sent home. The child must be treated before returning to school. A Head Start nurse will check for live lice upon the child's return to school.
- **Strep Throat, Scarlet Fever, or Other Strep Infections** - Can return to school 24 hours after treatment started, and the child is free from fever.
- **Impetigo** - Can return to school 24 hours after treatment is started.
- **Oral Herpes/Shingles** - Can return to school when lesions are dry (if lesions cannot be covered).

Allergy Awareness

- Head Start is a peanut and tree nut-free school.
- If your child has a medically determined allergy, documentation from a health provider must be given to the nurse.

Medication Administration

Procedure:

1. If medication administration is required on-site, give the medication directly to the nurse or teacher. Never send medications in your child's backpack.
2. Medications are only allowed in school with the original label affixed to the container, clearly stating the child's name, frequency and dosage amounts, and the doctor's name.
3. Antibiotics prescribed three times daily will not be given at school. They can be given before school, after school, and at bedtime.
4. Medications will only be given with signed parental/guardian permission.
5. A nurse will administer medication. In the absence of a nurse, other staff will be delegated to administer the medication. This will be documented on the Medication Administration Record (MAR).
6. The nurse will:
 - Inform appropriate staff of potential benefits and side effects of the medication taken by the child.
 - Observe, evaluate, and report the child's health status and reaction to the medication at school. This information will be given to the child's parent/guardian and/or health provider as necessary.
7. All medication will be safely stored.
8. Non-prescription medications will be given to a child as deemed necessary by a nurse or designated staff member upon approval by the parent/guardian. Parents/guardians have the right to refuse any/all non-prescription medications.
9. It is the parent/guardian responsibility to pick up unused medication at the end of the year or when medication is no longer needed.
10. Head Start staff receive yearly training on administering medications.

Serving Children with Disabilities

Head Start supports children with developmental delays or disabilities, and those who may be eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Our program ensures the individualized needs of children with disabilities are being met and all children have access to and can participate in the full range of activities and services in the least restrictive environment. If your child has a diagnosed disability, receives early intervention services, or you have concerns about your child's development, we encourage open communication and are here to support you.

Suspension and Expulsion

Head Start is committed to supporting all children so they can safely participate and be successful in the classroom. Children are not expelled or unenrolled due to behavior. Suspension is only used as a last resort when there is an immediate safety concern that cannot be resolved through supports and interventions. In some cases, a modified school day may be used temporarily to better meet a child's needs.

When behavioral concerns arise, the program works closely with families, teachers, a mental health consultant, and community partners to develop a Behavior Support Plan that teaches new skills and reduces challenging behavior. If concerns continue after supports are in place, the team may discuss whether an alternative setting would better meet the child's needs.

Family participation is essential. If a parent/guardian is not engaged in the behavior support process and serious concerns continue, the child may not be able to attend until a meeting takes place and a support plan is in place with program leadership.

Emergency Response

The Grand Forks Public School District (GFPS) has developed a school emergency management plan to address threats, disturbances, disasters, fires and weather events. Students participate in fire, tornado and lock down drills. In the event our school campus experiences one of the above emergency situations, staff and students may evacuate to an alternate site. If an evacuation has occurred and re-entry to our school is not likely, students and staff will remain at an alternate site and follow reunification procedures. Events will be communicated via GFPS automated phone calling system.

Classroom Closures

Classroom closures may occur. Announcements will be made via Seesaw and/or the GFPS automated phone calling system. It is your responsibility to regularly check Seesaw announcements.

Weather related announcements will be announced on district webpage and social media accounts; local tv and radio stations; and the automated phone calling system.

Supervision On School Grounds

North Dakota Supervision Guidelines state: *"Children 8 years and younger should be supervised at all times."* This includes on school grounds, both inside and outside the building and inside vehicles. Supervision is the responsibility of the parent/guardian until the child is in the care of classroom staff.

Vehicle and Pedestrian Safety

Vehicle:

- Families and staff operating vehicles near entrances, exits, and other pedestrian areas must not jeopardize the safety and well-being of pedestrians.
- Do not exceed 10 miles per hour in the parking lot.
- Yield and stop at all crosswalks and stop signs.
- Do not allow children to exit or enter a vehicle without an adult at the door of the vehicle.
- Children are required to be in age-appropriate restraints (child safety seat or booster seat).

Pedestrian:

- Hold children's hands while walking to and from the building. Ensure children are safely inside the building or vehicle before releasing them.
- Watch for vehicles and teach your children how to look left, right, and left again when crossing driveways and streets. Walk, don't run, when crossing the parking lot, driveway, or street.
- Walk with your children at a pace slow enough for them to keep up.
- Make eye contact with drivers to ensure they see you before crossing.
- Refrain from cell phone use while escorting your children.

Classroom Policies

Clothing: Learning is messy, so send your child to school in wash-and-wear clothing. Send an extra set of clothing to keep at school in case of spills or accidents. Children need clothing suited for the weather. In the spring and fall, it is helpful to dress your child in layers such as a sweatshirt and a jacket. In the winter, your child will need snow pants, warm boots, a hat and mittens. Label your child's winter gear.

Food/Beverages: Outside food and beverages are NOT allowed at Head Start. Many children have allergies or special diets. In order to ensure healthy nutrition for all children, we provide appropriate meals, snacks and nutritional activities.

Toys and Supplies: Head Start provides everything your child needs at school. We ask you to provide a backpack large enough to fit books and art work. DO NOT allow your child to bring toys from home.

Seesaw

Seesaw is a web-based, digital application families can upload to their phones, tablets or computers to communicate with Head Start staff and stay connected with their child's classroom. We use Seesaw to share photos and videos of classroom activities, post information about school/community programs and events, and to message individually with family members. Families will receive login information from the teacher.

Volunteering & In-Kind

Our program has NO FEES for families. Head Start receives federal funding to operate. Twenty percent of funding comes in the form of "in-kind", which is donated time and goods families and community members provide. **200 In-Kind hours** per child are needed to meet federal requirements and sustain program funding, which equals **5 hours per week** throughout the school year.

How can families be involved and provide in-kind? Parents can participate in:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ~ Parent Committee meetings | ~ Policy Council |
| ~ Parent education classes | ~ Special classroom events |
| ~ Backpack Reading | ~ Parent-Teacher conferences |
| ~ Take home activities | ~ Volunteer in the classroom |

Head Start Parent Committees and Policy Council

Parent Committees: All parents/guardians of enrolled children are members of the Parent Committee. Parent Committees provide opportunities for families to connect, share ideas, support program activities, and become involved in their child's learning. Parent involvement helps strengthen our program and supports positive outcomes.

Policy Council: The Policy Council is a leadership group made up primarily of parents/guardians of enrolled children, along with community representatives. Members are elected each fall and meet monthly throughout the program year. The Policy Council plays an important role in helping guide the program. Members work in partnership with staff to review and provide input on policies, services, and activities to ensure we meet the needs of children and families. Policy Council reviews information related to program quality, school readiness goals, ongoing monitoring, and program finances, including grant applications and funding decisions. Serving on the Policy Council is a valuable opportunity for parents to develop leadership skills, advocate for children and families, and have a voice in shaping the program.

Family Engagement and Family Outcomes

We believe families are a child's first and most important teacher. Family engagement means building strong, respectful partnerships which support the success and well-being of both children and families.

Through the Family Partnership process, we work together to identify family strengths, set goals, and connect with resources. We strive to support the following outcomes:

Family Well-Being – Families have access to the resources and supports they need to be safe, healthy, and financially secure.

Positive Parent-Child Relationships – Families build strong, nurturing relationships that support their child's development, learning, and emotional well-being.

Families as Lifelong Educators – Families encourage and participate in their child's learning at home, at school, and in the community through everyday experiences and interactions.

Families as Learners – Families pursue their own educational, career, and personal goals through learning opportunities, training, and skill development.

Family Engagement in Transitions – Families are supported as they help their children successfully transition to new classrooms, schools, and learning environments.

Family Connections to Peers and Community – Families develop supportive relationships with other families, community members, and organizations that strengthen social connections and access to resources.

Families as Advocates and Leaders – Families have opportunities to share their voices, participate in leadership roles, contribute to program decision-making, and advocate for children and families within the program and community.

Home Visits and Conferences

Home Visits:

To strengthen the partnership between home and school, teachers conduct two home visits each year. The first home visit provides an opportunity for your child's teacher to get to know your family, learn about your child's interests and strengths, and begin building a positive relationship. The second home visit offers time to celebrate your child's growth and accomplishments and reflect on the school year together.

During the visit, the teacher may read a book, engage your child in a simple activity, and discuss your child's development and learning. Families may share information about their child, provide input on the curriculum, discuss family interests and goals, and partner with the teacher to establish or review school readiness goals.

Parent-Teacher Conferences:

Parent-teacher conferences are held twice each year. These conferences provide an opportunity to discuss your child's progress, strengths, interests, and development. Families are encouraged to share feedback, ask questions, and provide input regarding their child's educational experiences.

Curriculum and Practices

The Creative Curriculum:

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool helps teachers build a positive foundation of knowledge of child development and best classroom practices and provides support for helping every child succeed. It includes 38 objectives organized into nine areas of development and learning:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| ~ Social-Emotional | ~ Physical |
| ~ Language | ~ Cognitive |
| ~ Literacy | ~ Mathematics |
| ~ Science and Technology | ~ Social Studies |
| ~ The Arts | ~ English Language Acquisition – receptive and expressive language progress |

The activities we plan for children, the way we organize the environment, select toys and materials, plan the daily schedule, and talk with children, meet the goals of our curriculum and give children a successful start in school.

AI's Pals:

AI's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices helps children learn important social-emotional and life skills. This curriculum is designed for young children and uses fun, interactive activities such as stories, songs, puppets, and role-playing. Children learn how to identify and express feelings, make safe and healthy choices, solve problems, and get along with others. The lessons also help children build self-control, kindness, and respect for themselves and others.

Conscious Discipline:

Conscious Discipline is a framework for supporting children's social and emotional development. Conscious Discipline is a relationship-based approach that teaches children how to manage emotions, solve problems, and build positive connections with others. Instead of focusing on punishment, adults are trained to respond to challenging behavior in a calm, consistent, and supportive way.

Children are taught skills such as recognizing and naming feelings, using safe ways to express emotions, and practicing self-regulation. Adults model respectful communication and help children learn expectations through daily routines, connection, and guidance. The goal is to create a safe, predictable, and caring environment where all children can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Pyramid Model:

The Pyramid Model is a framework for helping children learn important social and emotional skills in a positive and supportive way. This approach starts by making sure every child has caring relationships with adults and feel safe and welcomed in the classroom. Adults teach children how to recognize and manage feelings, share, take turns, and solve problems.

Assessment

Children are assessed using Teaching Strategies GOLD. The classroom environment, teacher-child interactions and teaching practices are assessed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS):

MTSS is a framework to provide all students with the best opportunities to succeed academically, socially, emotionally and behaviorally in school. Our MTSS Team meets regularly to discuss the needs of students with a focus on providing skills-based learning interventions matched to student needs, monitoring progress and making decisions about changes in instruction or goals. Data is used to support student learning and support staff implementation of effective practices.

School Readiness and Outcomes

Grand Forks Head Start School Readiness Goals reflect five domains of learning:

1. Approaches to Learning
2. Social and Emotional Development
3. Cognitive and General Knowledge
4. Language and Literacy
5. Perceptual Motor and Physical Development

Our School Readiness Goals help guide children's learning and development. These goals are based on information gathered from developmental screenings and ongoing assessments, including the Brigance Early Childhood Screen, Preschool Language Scale, Hodson Assessment of Phonological Patterns, and the Ages & Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional.

Teachers monitor each child's progress throughout the year through observations, small-group activities, and individualized lesson planning. Child outcome data is collected and reviewed at least three times each year to help teachers plan instruction, support children's growth, and continuously improve our program.

Volunteer Expectations

Volunteers are expected to follow our school-wide expectations with all children, families, staff, and community members.

Practices to Support Children

- Ask for help whenever you are unsure of what to do or say.
- Wear comfortable clothing that allows you to sit on the floor with children.
- Offer encouragement and positive praise to children.
- Talk with children and ask questions about their activities and learning.
- Be engaged with children rather than talking with other adults.
- Support children in developing new skills and encourage them to do tasks for themselves.
- During meals, sit and talk with children about the food and related topics (such as colors, textures, and food groups). Encourage children to try all foods offered, but do not force them.
- Follow safety guidelines to maintain a safe environment.

Supervision and Safety

Children cannot be left alone with volunteers. Staff maintain active supervision at all times and are responsible for the care, safety, and oversight of all children.

Cell Phone Use

Volunteers must keep cell phones silenced and stored away while volunteering in the classroom or other program areas. If you need to make or receive an urgent call, step outside the classroom or speak with a staff member.

Health

Do not volunteer if you are feeling sick or have a contagious illness, such as a cold or flu.

Emergency/First Aid

If a situation occurs where first aid is needed for you or a child, allow trained Head Start staff to provide care and support. Volunteers should avoid direct contact with bodily fluids such as blood or vomit. Emergency exits and evacuation routes are clearly posted in each classroom, and staff will guide you in the event of an emergency.

Positive Guidance and Discipline

We use positive guidance strategies to support children's development and learning. Staff help children learn appropriate behavior through modeling, teaching, and redirection based on each child's developmental level. If a situation requires support, allow staff to step in and handle the situation.

Standards of Conduct

All volunteers must follow the Head Start Standards of Conduct. Volunteers must not engage in behaviors which maltreat or endanger the health or safety of children, including, at a minimum:

- Corporal punishment; or physically abusive behavior, defined as intentional use of physical force that results in, or has the potential to result in, physical injury. Examples include, but are not limited to, hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, pushing, restraining, force feeding, or dragging;
- Sexually abusive behavior, defined as any completed or attempted sexual act, sexual contact, or exploitation. Examples include, but are not limited to, behaviors such as inappropriate touching, inappropriate filming, or exposing a child to other sexual activities;
- Emotionally harmful or abusive behavior, defined as behaviors which harm a child's self worth or emotional well-being. Examples include, but are not limited to, using seclusion, using or exposing a child to public or private humiliation, or name calling, shaming, intimidating, or threatening a child; and
- Neglectful behavior, defined as the failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs including access to food, education, medical care, appropriate supervision by an adequate caregiver, and safe physical and emotional environments. Examples include, but are not limited to, leaving a child unattended on a bus, withholding food as punishment or refusing to change soiled diapers as punishment.

Volunteers must respect and promote the unique identity of each individual and will not stereotype on any basis, including gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or family composition. Violation of standards of conduct may result in immediate removal from the program.

Mandated Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect

Head Start requires volunteers to report suspected child abuse and neglect. If you have reason to suspect a child is being abused or neglected, you must immediately report your concerns to a staff member. Examples of suspected abuse or neglect may include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect. Definitions and examples of these behaviors are provided in this handbook (Standards of Conduct). Concerns may involve a parent or guardian, family member, Head Start staff member, consultant, volunteer, or any other individual who has contact with the child. Program leadership will assist with the reporting process and ensure concerns are handled promptly, confidentially, and in accordance with state law and Head Start requirements. Volunteers should never investigate suspected abuse or neglect on their own. Any concern, no matter how minor it may seem, should be reported immediately so appropriate steps can be taken to ensure the child's safety.

Confidentiality

As a volunteer, you may see or hear private and confidential information about children, families, and staff. To protect the privacy and dignity of everyone in the program, all information learned through volunteering must remain confidential and may not be shared with anyone outside of authorized Head Start staff. If you have questions or concerns about a child or family, please speak directly with a staff member rather than discussing the matter with others. Maintaining confidentiality helps create a safe, respectful, and trusting environment for children and families.