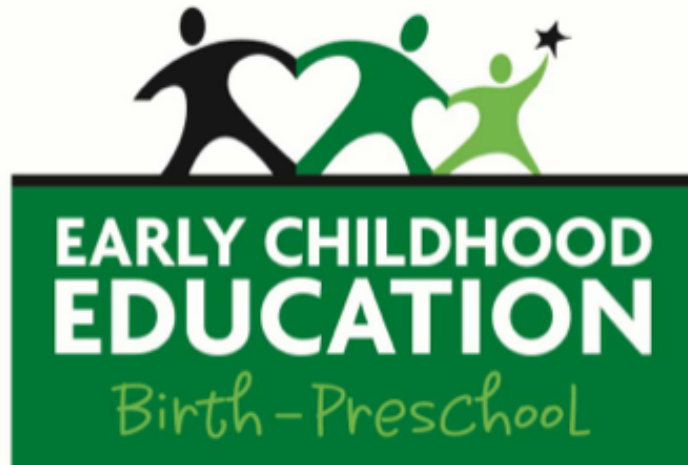
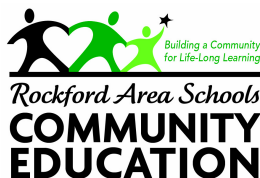


# Rockford Area Early Childhood Programs



**2026-27**

## Staff Handbook



Rockford Area Early Childhood Programs is a  
program of the Rockford Area Schools Community  
Education Department.

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## Introduction

Welcome to Rockford Early Childhood Programs; we are glad to have you as part of our team. The purpose of this handbook is to assist you in knowing more about the Early Childhood Programs, your responsibilities as staff, and Early Childhood policies and procedures.

Whether a staff of ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education) or SR (School Readiness (Launching Pad Preschool)), our first mission is to be a warm, welcoming and safe place where parents and children feel a sense of belonging and importance. We strive to provide this for all of our families and help it guide us in our work with them.

Please take some time to familiarize yourself with the contents of the Early Childhood Staff Handbook. The introduction includes general information specific to the Early Childhood Programs. Also included in the Handbook are important Personnel Policies. If you need further information, all Rockford Area School District policies can be found on the school district website, [www.rockford.k12.mn.us](http://www.rockford.k12.mn.us). Since the Early Childhood Programs are part of the Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School, its handbook is included as well.

## Philosophy

ECFE's Mission and Message: To strengthen families through education and to offer support for parents as they provide the best possible home environment for the healthy growth and development of their children. The task of parenting is important. ECFE recognizes and supports parents' understanding of their children, as well as their parental roles. What parents do to guide and nurture their own children along with their skills in working with others who share responsibility for their child's development (teachers, schools and other in the community) is critical to each child's future and the future of our nation.

ECFE/SR: We believe that a child learns best in an atmosphere of love, warmth and acceptance. Our teachers listen to children, allow them to take the initiative, and yet guide them in productive and non-competitive ways.

Our program is founded on the belief that all children have great potential, are curious, and interested in constructing their own learning. We encourage positive peer and social relations, development of critical thinking skills, and facilitate the development of self-esteem by fostering independence and problem-solving skills.

We further believe that parents are a child's first and primary teachers and we enhance and support parents in this important role.

*It is important to remember that development is a journey, not a race. Children benefit from the individual, measured pacing of the journey, not from achieving developmental milestones at the earliest opportunity. We offer only*

*developmentally appropriate activities for the children and will not push beyond what they are comfortable doing.*

Jean Piaget generally is recognized as the leader in the field of early childhood education in the research and understanding of a child's development. From ages two to seven, a child is developing many of the cognitive skills that are the foundation for all formal learning. Attempts to hurry a child's cognitive development are not worthwhile: Piaget's research documents that the stages of cognitive development cannot be skipped, nor is it possible to speed through them. While most children at the youngest ages are able to memorize and recite, these skills do not represent meaningful learning in the preschool years. In our setting, we encourage deep and complex thinking. This fosters the tendency in children to be curious, to wonder, investigate then to question, study, and analyze so they can think critically. This is true preparation for life-long learning. "Academics" are very much embedded within our daily work. They are found in both the ordinary moments of our day and in the project work that we may do.

*Children have a real understanding only of that which they invent themselves, and each time we try to teach them something too quickly, we keep them from reinventing it themselves.*

~ Jean Piaget

## Curriculum

Our staff has been greatly influenced by training we have received in Reggio Emilia-Inspired Philosophy. We are members of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance and the Minnesota Reggio Network. We attend Reggio networking sessions and continually explore literature about Reggio to broaden our knowledge.

Creative Curriculum is research based, aligned with the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs), and reflective of our Reggio-inspired approach to early education. Ours is an emergent curriculum – we are always learning and changing as we strive to ascertain what works best for providing children with tools for learning.

Together, the Reggio Philosophy and Creative Curriculum foster methods of teaching children that reflect "best practices" for age and developmentally-appropriate activities that are exciting, creative, and best encourage children's growth and learning.

### **What is a Reggio-inspired approach?**

Reggio Emilia, a city in northern Italy, is the home of what many people consider the best program in the world for young children, ages birth to six.

**The Reggio Emilia philosophy** sees the child as unique, strong, and full of potential; it envisions environments that are reflective of learning and relationships between children, teachers and parents.

The Reggio Emilia approach to education is committed to the creation of conditions for learning that will enhance and facilitate the child's construction of his or her own powers of thinking through the fusion of all the expressive, communicative and cognitive languages.

**The Reggio Emilia approach is based upon the following principles:**

- The image of the child as curious, competent, and able to build theories.
- Shared discussions among children, among adults, and between adults and children are ways children represent what is learned. Through repeated conversations and revisiting ideas, children can reconstruct their earlier theories.
- The Reggio approach is about guiding children's ideas with provocations. There is collaboration on many levels. Parents are considered an essential collaborator and parent participation is desired and supported.
- The Reggio Emilia approach calls for the introduction of a wide array of creative media and activities as a means of enhancing children's creative, social, and cognitive development. The children represent their ideas and emotions through many "languages," including spoken and written words, visual arts, drama, music, movement, construction and more.
- The teacher's role within the Reggio Emilia approach is complex. Teachers co-explore the learning experience with the children to provoke ideas, problem solve, and foster critical thinking skills. Teachers help children see the connections in learning and experiences and help children express their knowledge through representational work.
- Teachers document children's processes of learning in many ways - through photographs, written records, journals, etc. Projects can emerge from children's ideas and/or interests, or by knowing what is of interest to children, teachers can introduce them: shadows, puddles, tall buildings, construction sites, nature, etc.
- Time is a critical factor but not measured by the clock or calendar. Children's own personal rhythms and own sense of time is considered important.

## **Staff**

Teachers are typically licensed in early childhood education and are carefully selected by our interviewing committee. Teachers are required to attend workshops, conferences, and other in-service training opportunities to keep abreast of the best way to enhance children's learning.

**Coordinator:** Tiffany Reinhard

**Administrators:** Melissa Joseph, Community Education Director

**Advisory Council:** Composed of community members, including parents with children in the program, the advisory council assists with direction, support, program development, public relations, and evaluation of the program.

## **Absences/Sick Days/Substitutes**

When a sub is needed unexpectedly due to illness, sick child, etc., please call the Early Childhood Program (ECP) Coordinator. If it is after hours or you can't reach the Coordinator in the office, call his/her cell phone and leave a message, or text him/her. Then, contact Teachers on Call to request a substitute, if unable to cover it internally. Often the Coordinator can assist you in securing a substitute for subsequent days, if needed, due to your own or your child's illness. Sometimes the Coordinator can adjust staff or check on another staff's availability.

When you are requesting to be gone for a family function, vacation, appointment, etc., approval must be gotten from the ECP Coordinator in advance of looking for a sub.

Our first priority is to staff our program, and sometimes you may not be aware of other circumstances that have evolved that may affect staffing. Though the Coordinator will try to be flexible and honor your requests, there could be a time when it may not be feasible due to extenuating circumstances. Once it is approved, then secure a substitute and let the Coordinator know who/when, etc.

## **Confidentiality**

It is expected of all staff to be vigilant about confidentiality and data privacy. You will often be aware of sensitive information regarding children and their families and it is expected that this information will not be discussed except with the coordinator, the Community Ed Director, and/or other staff working directly with the child/family, on a need-to-know basis.

When speaking about an incident to a parent, always use the phrase, "the other child;" DO NOT USE NAMES.

Home or work phone numbers/addresses, etc., of staff, or parents and children should not be given out to anyone other than staff. Staff can take a message and relay the information needed to the other party.

The only exception is when a parent has given written permission to share phone numbers, email address, or mailing address with other children/families in the class.

## **Dress**

Staff should wear clothing that is comfortable and appropriate for working with children. Appearance should be neat and clean.

## **Emergency School Closing/Late Start**

**If school is closed for any reason, then Preschool and ECFE classes (including evening) will also be canceled. If there is a two-hour late start, there will be no morning Preschool or morning ECFE classes; afternoon/evening classes will be in session as usual.**

**Make-Up Days:** After the first 2 weather related events, every effort will be made to make-up any classes that have been cancelled, dependent on time permitting in the

K-12 school calendar/ECFE session. Please refer to District Policy 806, district school closing procedure for more information.

## Emergency Procedures

We will participate in fire, tornado, and safety drills so the children are familiar with the procedures.

**The following procedures would be followed for these specific emergencies:**

1. Tornado - designated place of safety in our building
2. Fire – designated emergency exit routes
3. Winter weather closing - children will be dismissed to parents/guardians, buses, or GKP according to emergency procedures outlined by parents on Emergency Dismissal forms.
4. Power failure in the building – the program will follow the direction of the Superintendent; children may be sent home.
5. Minor scrapes and scratches - school health staff have been trained in first aid to be able to deal with this type of medical care.
6. *Stranger in the building, or threat in the community* drills, referred to as "safety" drills, are practiced regularly with a lockdown procedure in place.
7. Missing child - staff will search the area while the coordinator/teacher contacts the parents. If necessary, police will be called.

## Guidance Policy for Children

By noticing children behaving positively and commenting to them for this, the need for discipline is greatly reduced. We believe positive reinforcement, redirection of negative behavior, and an explanation of what is expected and why is the best and the easiest way of handling inappropriate behavior. Yet, at times, purposeful discipline becomes necessary for the good of the individual child and the other children in the program.

**The following is the course of action that will be taken, if needed:**

1. First time - identify the undesirable action to the child as being inappropriate.
2. Second time - reminder of rule.
3. Third time - brief exclusion from the group and/or brief loss of privileges. (Child is excluded from the group for a very short time in an observable location. This type of time out is not meant as punishment, but as an opportunity for the child to take time away from the activity that led to the disruption.)
4. If the inappropriate behavior continues, a parent-teacher conference will be requested to discuss alternative measures of guidance.

### Referral:

The Launching Pad Preschool is designed to serve students ages three to five years old. It is a non-mandated community education preschool program. Though every effort is made to meet the educational

needs of every student, if a child's behavioral, developmental or cognitive needs exceed the typical services offered to children in our program, then we will seek parental permission to begin the referral process for consultation and/or assessment to the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) team. This is rooted in our commitment to the success of all students by providing developmentally appropriate education to each one.

## Gifts to Employees

### Refer to District Policy 421

Employees are not allowed to solicit, accept, or receive a gift from a student, parent, or other individual or organization of greater than nominal value. Parents/guardians and students are encouraged to write letters and notes of appreciation or to give small tokens of gratitude.

## Health Information

District #883 has a licensed school nurse on duty at all times. All immunizations must be current according to state law. A child in preschool must complete Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening (offered by the school district) prior to being enrolled in the program, within 90 days after the enrollment date, or when a child reaches the age of 3 years and 7 months. Parents should call our office to set up an appointment at 763-477-7500.

**For a child's well-being and the protection of the other children, a child should be kept home if he/she has the following:**

Red eyes	Heavy cough
Upset stomach	Ear ache
Open sores	Swollen glands
Fever	Diarrhea

**Children should be fever free for 24 hours *without* the aid of medicine (Tylenol, Motrin, Advil, etc.) before returning to school. Also, when the illness includes vomiting or diarrhea, a child should wait to return to school until it has been 24 hours since the last incident.**

The classroom teacher or Coordinator is responsible for contacting a parent if there is a concern regarding a child coming to school without adhering to this policy. Respect for the parent and concern for the child and the child's classmates should always be conveyed.

If a child becomes ill at school, the teacher will notify the parents, or the contact person listed on the emergency contacts if the parents cannot be reached. The child should rest in the nurse's office, if possible, while waiting to be picked-up. If not possible, the child should rest in a quiet place in the classroom away from the other children. There may be a possibility of the child resting in the ECP Office, if staff is available.

If a contagious illness exists among the preschool children, please notify the ECP Office staff so appropriate notification can be sent home with the children. Please keep the ill child's name in confidence when addressing any concerns of other parents.

The district student health services office is staffed by a licensed nurse. Other health services may be provided to students under the direction and supervision of a licensed school nurse. In the event of an emergency, 911 will be notified along with the parent/guardian.

## Medication

All prescription medications require a doctor's order and signed parent permission. The medication must be brought to the school in its original container with a label prepared by a pharmacist. This form must be completed annually (once per school year) and/or when a change in the prescription or requirements for administration occurs. Medication, with the exception of Epi-Pens, will be stored in a locked receptacle in the EC Office. Epi-Pens can be stored in the child's respective classroom.

## On Time/Late Staff

All employees are expected to report to work on time. If you are going to be unexpectedly late, contact the ECP Coordinator immediately.

## Photo ID's

Staff is required to wear a photo ID/name badge. Children and parents should be able to easily identify staff if they have a concern or question. These will be provided each year, though staff must have their photo taken when the all-school picture day takes place. If joining the staff during the year, please contact Payroll at the District Office for your photo and name badge.

## Pick-Up for Preschool Children:

- Parents are requested to bring their child to the classroom no more than 10 minutes before scheduled starting time. However, if a student is at the door once the REAMS bell sounds for K-4 entry, students will be welcomed. A child should not be dropped off outside the elementary school unless arrangements have been made previously with ECP staff.
- Parent must notify LPP if someone other than the parent will pick the child up from school on any one day or on a regular basis.
- Parents must notify LPP and transportation if their child is to get off the bus at any place other than the normal drop-off point. (A child may only be delivered to an area within the general bus route.) The transportation supervisor requests a three-day notice and parents are asked that they deviate from the normal bus route only in case of an emergency.
- Parents should pick their child up outside the classroom promptly at the scheduled release time.

## Telephone/Copier/Computer/Fax

The use of cell phones or work phones should be kept to a minimum, be brief, and on an emergency basis during work/teaching time. The same is expected in regards to texting, IM, etc. Teaching time is defined as, "when children/parents are present." Work time includes prep time before and after class, including time between classes, unless it is an employee's break/lunch time. The copier/fax machine/computer should not be used for personal use.

## Time Sheets/Pay Day

All staff will use SMARTeR to sign-in and out during their work day. Changes/corrections need to be communicated in writing to the Coordinator by 3:30 PM on the 15<sup>th</sup> and last day of every month. If you have questions, please see the ECP Coordinator.

## Title IX

Rockford Area Schools does not discriminate on the basis of sex and prohibits sex discrimination in any educational program or activity that it operates, as required by Title IX, including employment. All Title IX reports and concerns should be directed to the Superintendent of Schools.

More information about Title IX can be found at: <https://www.rockford883.org/district/departments/human-resources/title-ix>

## Tobacco-Free Schools

### Refer to District Policy 419

School district students and staff have the right to learn and work in an environment that is tobacco free. School policy is violated by any individual's use of tobacco, tobacco-related devices, or electronic cigarettes in a public school, on school grounds, in any school-owned vehicles, or at any school events or activities.

## Toileting Assistance

Two staff members should be present, if possible, to assist a child with his/her toileting issues. If two staff are not available, the staff person assisting the child will notify another staff member that they will be assisting a child with toileting needs. The staff person providing assistance should use the bathroom that is usually used by the children. Respectful and appropriate conversation and actions will be employed at all times with the child requiring assistance.

## Acknowledgement Form

I have received a copy of the 2026-27 Rockford Area Early Childhood Programs Staff Handbook.

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Staff Printed Name

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Staff Signature

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Date