



FAMILY HANDBOOK

MARY KAY MCNEILL EARLY LEARNING CENTER

2025-2026

INTRODUCTION

Antioch CCSD 34 is committed to creating an engaging and supportive learning environment where every student is inspired to dream and empowered to achieve. As a district, we strive to be the destination that unites ALL— students, families, staff, and community members—to transform the future together. We believe that strong partnerships between home and school are essential to student success, and open communication is key to ensuring a positive and enriching educational experience.

This handbook serves as a guide to our shared expectations, policies, and resources designed to support a safe, inclusive, and thriving school community. We encourage you to stay connected, ask questions, and work alongside us to make this a great school year for your child.

The District website offers additional information, including access to each school website, as well as staff contact information, updated calendars, news and announcements, and school board meeting agendas.

Mission and Vision

MISSION	VISION
We provide a safe, nurturing, and inclusive environment that effectively supports the needs of the children and families in our community and creates an early learning foundation for our students.	To be an early learning program providing an effective school experience for young learners by being positive role models and by providing a support system for our children, their families, and the community we serve.

Board Policy

Antioch CCSD 34 follows applicable federal and state statutes and guidelines, including those set out by the U.S. Department of Education, Illinois State Board of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and other applicable organizations. Antioch CCSD 34 also follows best-practice industry procedures. The complete Antioch CCSD 34 Board Policy Manual is available on the district website.

Handbook Availability and Amendment

The Mary Kay McNeill Family Handbook is a summary of the school's programming and expectations; and is not a comprehensive statement of school procedures. This handbook is available on the school and District website, and is available in the school office.

We reserve the right to amend the handbook during the school year without notice. Please refer to the most updated copy, as indicated by the revision date.

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BUILDING INFORMATION

Contact Information

ADDRESS	PHONE NUMBERS
Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center 817 N. Main Street Antioch, IL 60002	Phone: (847) 838-8901 Fax: (847) 838-8904 Absence Hotline: (847) 838-8181

School Hours

During the school year, Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center's main office is open from 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM daily. The office will be closed during non-school days and breaks.

Student Schedule

The Pre-K Program is located at the Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center. We offer morning and afternoon classes. Placement is determined by home address and availability.

AM SESSION	PM SESSION
M, T, Th, F: 8:15 AM - 10:55 AM Wednesday: 8:15 AM - 10:45 AM	M, T, Th, F: 12:25 PM - 3:05 PM Wednesday: 11:45 AM - 2:15 PM

DISTRICT INFORMATION

Contact Information

ADDRESS	PHONE NUMBERS
Administrative Services Center 964 Spafford Street Antioch, IL 60002	Phone: (847) 838-8401 Fax: (847) 838-8404

Department Contacts

TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT	STUDENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Mary Holsinger Director of Transportation (847) 838-8385 mholsinger@antioch34.com	Carole Allert Director of Student Services (847) 838-8421 callert@antioch34.com
Mandy Haling Transportation Secretary and Dispatch (847) 838-8388 ahaling@antioch34.com	Mckenna Gomez Coordinator of Student Services (847) 838-8463 mgomez@antioch34.com

BUILDING STAFF

ADMINISTRATION	MAIN OFFICE	HEALTH OFFICE
<p>Jodi Lax Principal (847) 838-8910 jlax@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Theresa Geer Head Secretary (847) 838-8901 tgeer@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Brittany Dix, Nurse (847) 838-8911 bdix@antioch34.com</p> <p>Olivia Hamby, Nurse (847) 838-8911 ohamby@antioch34.com</p>
CLASSROOM TEACHERS		
<p>Jessica Crawford (847) 838-8029 jcrawford@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Jennifer DeShasier (847) 838-8009 jdeshasier@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Marie Hanrahan (847) 838-8025 mhanrahan@antioch34.com</p>
<p>Valorie Revere (847) 838-8033 vreve@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Katrina Scheck (847) 838-8258 kscheck@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Ginny Smith (847) 838-8012 gsmith@antioch34.com</p>
RELATED SERVICE PROVIDERS		
<p>Janet Danesi School Psychologist (847) 838-8334 jdanesi@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Jill Everett Speech and Language Pathologist (847) 838-932 jeverett@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Jessica Kinzle Speech and Language Pathologist (847) 838-8036 jkinzle@antioch34.com</p>
<p>Pat Smith Social Worker (847) 838-8014 psmith@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Lauren Turner Parent Liaison (847) 838-8924 lturner@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Cathy Ulrich Occupational Therapist (847) 838-8257 culrich@antioch34.com</p>
SPECIALS TEACHERS		
<p>Millie Smith Music Teacher (847) 838-8021 msmith@antioch34.com</p>	<p>Tammy Bellucci Library Media Assistant (847) 838-8937 tbellucci@antioch34.com</p>	

INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION AND GENERAL NOTICES

Visitor Information

Our school has adopted a safety screening program for all visitors to the building. All visitors must sign in and out in the office. If you will be volunteering or participating in a daytime activity, please bring a driver's license or state ID with you to the office. The office staff will process your identification and provide you with a day pass attached to a red lanyard, which visitors are required to wear while in the building. This measure helps to ensure the safety of the students, staff, and visitors to our school.

Parent/Guardian Involvement

The Pre-K Program is designed for you and your child. We have many parent involvement opportunities offered during the day and/or at night. In order to be compliant with the state grant, families are required to participate in four (or more) face-to-face opportunities throughout the school year. A brief list of activities includes classroom visits and volunteering, family involvement activities, field trips, family projects, parent-child activities, parenting workshops, home visits, and more.

Parents are welcome to volunteer in the classrooms. We realize that we have both working and stay home parents, therefore, we try to provide opportunities for all of our families to help in ways most convenient for them. Parent volunteers are scheduled on your child's monthly classroom calendar. If you are unable to volunteer on your scheduled day, please notify your child's teacher.

Animals On School Property

In order to assure student health and safety, animals are not allowed on school property, except in the case of a service animal accompanying a student or other individual with a documented disability. This rule may be waived by administration in the case of an educational opportunity for students, provided that (a) the animal is appropriately housed, humanely cared for, and properly handled, and (b) students will not be exposed to a dangerous animal or an unhealthy environment.

Cross Reference: Board Policy [6:100](#)

Healthy Snacks

One important part of learning is making sure our bodies and minds are prepared and ready to learn. We know it is important to get fresh air, exercise, sleep, and healthy foods. One healthy food choice that we can help our students make here at school is to eat a healthy fruit or vegetable at snack time in the classroom.

As a part of the Preschool For All grant program, we are able to provide milk and a snack for your child on a daily basis. You will receive a monthly snack calendar, but if you would like to send in a different snack for your child, some approved options are listed below. Dipping sauces, fruit snacks/roll-ups, and fruit juices are not allowed.

Fruits

- Apples
- Apricots
- Bananas
- Blackberries
- Blueberries
- Cherries
- Cranberries
- Dats
- Dried Fruit
- Figs
- Grapefruit
- Grapes
- Kiwi
- Mango
- Melon
- Nectarines
- Oranges
- Papaya
- Peaches
- Pineapple
- Plums
- Raisins
- Raspberries
- Strawberries
- Tangerines
- Watermelon
- Fruit cups drained of juice and in a sealed container

Vegetables

- Broccoli
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Cucumbers
- Cherry Tomatoes
- Peppers

Please know that if you send in a snack that is not approved, it may be sent home. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with the district snack policy.

Birthdays

Your child's birthday is an exciting event. We love celebrating our student's birthdays and in honor of our school's namesake, former D34 teacher and principal Mrs. Mary Kay McNeill, every child will receive a book on their birthday. If you would like to send in a treat for your child's class, we encourage you to send in a non-edible item.

Listed below are several ways to celebrate your child's birthday here at school:

Guest Reader: In all grades we welcome parents, grandparents, other family members or special friends to visit the classroom to read a book to the class. It can be a special one that the child has picked out or one that the reader has chosen. Please email your child's teacher to arrange a time that is suitable for you both.

Classroom Gift: Purchase a gift for the classroom, wrap it and the teacher will have your child unwrap the gift and share it with the class. Examples of acceptable gifts are puzzles, books, card games, or a board game for the classroom. Contact the teacher for other suggestions for the room. Your child will be surprised and the gift will be used over and over during the year.

Treat Bags: Goodie Bags are allowed; however, they must be filled with non-edibles such as: pencils, erasers, stickers, rings, little puzzles, books, small notebooks, crayons, yoyos, bubbles, balls, etc.

Bring a Book: Have your child bring his/her favorite book to be read to the class. Your child or the teacher can read the book to the class.

Healthy celebrations are an important part of providing a healthy school environment. They promote positive lifestyle choices to reduce student risks and improve learning. If you would like to send in an edible treat to celebrate your child's birthday it must be a treat from the list below:

- Animal Crackers
- Applesauce
- Cheese Cubes
- Cheez It Crackers
- Craisins
- Fresh Fruit
- Fresh Veggies
- Fruit Smoothie
- Fruit Cup/Squeeze Pouch
- Goldfish Crackers
- Mini Muffins (Peanut free)
- Mini Rice Cakes (Peanut Free)
- Pretzels
- Raisins
- String Cheese
- Teddy Grahams
- Welch's or Mott's Fruit Snacks
- Whole Grain Pop Tart
- Whole Grain Rice Krispie Treat
- Yogurt Cup, Tube or Squeeze Pouch

Clothing

Students engage in a variety of hands-on and physical activities, including painting, using Play-Dough, playing on the floor, climbing, and outdoor play. Please dress your child in comfortable, weather-appropriate clothing that allows for movement and exploration. To ensure your child is prepared for any accidents or spills, an extra set of clothes may be kept at school.

Shoes

Students will participate in outdoor play and motor activities every day. To ensure safety and comfort, students should wear tennis shoes or closed-toed shoes to school. Flip-flops and other open-toed shoes are not allowed, as they can pose a safety risk during physical activities. Proper footwear helps students stay active and prevents injuries.

Dress for the Weather

Please ensure your child is dressed appropriately for the weather, especially during colder months. Label all outdoor winter clothing, including coats, hats, gloves, scarves, and boots, to help prevent items from being lost or misplaced. Proper attire ensures students stay comfortable and safe during outdoor activities.

Backpacks

Students should bring a backpack to school each day to help transport important materials between home and school. Backpacks must be large enough to hold a folder and should not have wheels. To prevent mix-ups, please label your child's backpack with their name. Parents/guardians should check their child's backpack daily for notes, papers, and important school communications. For students who ride the bus, the school will attach a bus tag to the backpack, clearly labeling the child's bus route for easy identification.

Toys and Personal Items

To prevent items from being lost, broken, or causing distractions, students should leave toys and personal belongings at home. Bringing toys to school can also create unnecessary distractions, particularly on the bus. Keeping personal items at home helps maintain a focused and organized learning environment.

PROGRAMMING

Pre-Kindergarten Philosophy

Young children are active learners who explore the world around them through hands-on experiences with people, objects, and new materials. Practicing newly developed skills and engaging in meaningful exploration are essential to early childhood development. Our Pre-K program provides a play-based environment that is balanced with a structured and organized routine to support successful learning.

Play is a fundamental part of growth, promoting social, emotional, cognitive, motor, and language development. As educators, our role is to facilitate and encourage play while fostering positive self-esteem and independent functioning. It is our responsibility to create a stimulating, challenging, pleasant, and safe environment—one that allows children to explore confidently and successfully.

Interaction with both adults and peers is vital to a child's learning experience and is often facilitated through developmentally appropriate activities, including toys, books, music, motor activities, group time, quiet spaces, and classroom centers. Our program provides individualized opportunities that meet the unique needs and interests of each child, fostering a spirit of inclusion and acceptance for all.

Preschool For All Blended Program

The Preschool for All program is an Illinois state grant funded program that serves over 100 students. To participate in the program, a student must be found eligible via a D34 pre-kindergarten screening. Eligibility is based on students living within D34 boundaries, students being 3-5 years of age, and not yet age eligible for kindergarten, and meets state-approved at-risk criteria. It is a half-day classroom based program that follows the district calendar. Transportation is provided to and from school. A nutritious snack is provided to students each day. Children with special needs are also included in our Preschool for All classrooms.

The grant program uses Creative Curriculum, a research-based program that incorporates child development, early education research and educational theory. The grant classrooms are play based and designed to promote growth in the following areas of development: social-emotional, cognitive, motor, and language. Each classroom consists of a scheduled day which fosters flexible learning for each student. Active student engagement is accomplished through learning centers with staff facilitating play and positive interactions.

The grant program follows the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS). These learning standards provide guidance to teachers in order to create and sustain developmentally appropriate experiences for young children. Individual student development is monitored through checklists, a collection of student work samples, teacher observations, and narrative summaries.

Each classroom is served by a multidisciplinary team comprised of an Illinois licensed classroom teacher, a paraprofessional, a speech language pathologist, an occupational therapist, a counselor (either a social worker or psychologist), a physical therapist, and any other related services required to support the classroom and individual needs of the students.

Family participation is a required component of the grant program. There are many opportunities to be involved in the classroom and then program, such as: volunteering (per teacher discretion), family involvement activities, workshops, and field trips. Families do not pay any fees to be a part of the grant program. This includes fees such as registration, tuition, materials, snack, milk, and field trips.

Structured Learning Program

The Structured Learning Program is for children ages three to five and part of the special education continuum within Antioch CCSD 34. Children are found eligible for the Structured Learning Program through the special education eligibility process and placement determined by the Individual Education Program (IEP) educational team through an IEP plan.

Each classroom will be served by a multidisciplinary team comprised of a special education early childhood classroom teacher, a paraprofessional, a speech language pathologist, an occupational therapist, a counselor (either a social worker or psychologist), a physical therapist, and any other related services required to support the classroom and individual needs of the students. The maximum number of students within the classroom is six. The classroom is structured and addresses students' goals within the Individualized Education Program. The Structured Learning Program focuses on communication, sensory needs, behavior interventions, de-escalation techniques, visuals, limited transitions, and a high level of support from the Educational Team.

The Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research (STAR) is used as a supplemental curriculum within the classroom. This research based curriculum will support staff in teaching students functional routines and is aligned to state standards. The curriculum will allow for teachers to provide individual, developmentally appropriate activities.

The Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS) provide guidance to teachers in early childhood programs to create and sustain developmentally appropriate experiences for young children. Children are found eligible for the Structured Learning Program through the special education eligibility process and placement determined by the Individual Education Program (IEP) educational team through an IEP plan.

Registration fees are required for students who receive special education services.

CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENT

Curriculum

In our Preschool for All classrooms, we use Creative Curriculum to design the classroom environment and plan daily activities that support comprehensive early learning. When developing lesson plans, we incorporate all key areas of the curriculum, including math, language and literacy, science, fine and gross motor skills, music and movement, art, and social skills. Activities are carefully designed to meet each child's individual needs while aligning with the Illinois Early Learning & Development Standards set by the state of Illinois. Lessons and activities are structured for large group, small group, and one-on-one interactions to foster meaningful learning experiences.

Our curriculum follows a theme-based approach, with each theme lasting approximately 3 to 6 weeks, depending on student interest and content depth. To keep families informed and engaged, we send home parent letters outlining the current classroom theme and activities. Since young children often find it challenging to recall and share details about their school day, these updates help families start conversations about classroom experiences.

Family involvement is an essential part of our program, and we provide opportunities for parents/guardians to engage through homework calendars, take-home activities, family projects, and vacation ideas. These components reinforce learning beyond the classroom and encourage a strong home-school connection.

Assessment

The Pre-K program utilizes Teaching Strategies GOLD as an authentic assessment tool to track student growth and development. This tool includes teacher checklists, summary reports, and student portfolios to provide a comprehensive view of each child's progress. Summary reports are compiled and shared with parents/guardians during fall and spring conferences.

Throughout the year, teachers collect student work samples, photographs, and developmental data in individual portfolios. These portfolios serve as a visual representation of each child's progress, allowing educators to share growth milestones in a meaningful and accessible way during conferences.

In addition to formal assessments, teachers continuously assess students through informal and structured observations during both play-based and teacher-directed activities. These activities are thoughtfully designed to engage children in a fun and interactive way while providing opportunities for teachers to track skill development and learning progress. Our ultimate goal is to foster a love for learning and school, ensuring that each child is excited, engaged, and supported in their educational journey.

ATTENDANCE

Student Absences

Parents/guardians are required to report all student absences by calling the Attendance Hotline at (847) 838-8181. When leaving a message, please provide your child's name and their teacher's name. To ensure proper documentation, calls should be made at least 15 minutes before the start of the school day. Please note that you must call the Attendance Hotline, even if you have already informed your child's teacher of the absence.

If your child rides the school bus, please also contact the Transportation Department at (847) 838-8388 as early as possible to cancel transportation for the day. Notifying the Transportation Department in advance helps ensure that bus routes run efficiently and on time.

eLearning Days

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) provides schools with the flexibility to use eLearning days in lieu of emergency days, pursuant to Public Act 101-0012. Per the Act, school districts are permitted to use a maximum of five (5) eLearning days in place of the emergency days included on the backend of our school calendar. During eLearning days, schools are responsible for providing students with meaningful learning experiences and are accountable for the time that both students and staff are engaged in learning activities.

In the event that an eLearning day is called, the following will be provided by the teachers and staff at the MKM Early Learning Center:

Teacher Responsibilities

- In preparation for potential eLearning days, staff will be preparing educational choice boards and materials.
- By 9:00 AM on the day of eLearning, staff will communicate with families regarding the choice boards and learning opportunities/activities for the day.
- Staff will be available and accessible by email between the hours of 9:00 AM and 2:30 PM.
- Staff may offer a synchronous (live) meeting time for students/families as a check-in and/or check-out for the day. This information and any necessary links will be shared by the staff member.

Student Responsibilities

- Students and families should check for communication from their teacher beginning at 9:00 AM.
- Students and families will be given a choice of learning opportunities and activities. They will select which items they would like to complete and work on that during the day.
- Questions may be directed to the teacher via email between 9:00 AM and 2:30 PM.
- Families may share with their teacher what learning opportunities or activities they completed.

Certified and non-Certified Special Education Staff

- Student IEP Remote Learning Plans will be followed. Synchronous/asynchronous instruction will be provided in accordance to the student's schedule for the given school day.

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Field Trips

During registration, parents/guardians signed a permission slip allowing their child to participate in any scheduled field trips throughout the school year. Field trips will be listed on the monthly calendar, and separate permission slips for individual field trips will not be sent home.

If parent participation is required for a specific field trip, a notice will be sent home.

Family Conferences

Family conferences are held in the fall and spring for every child, providing an opportunity for parents/guardians to discuss their child's progress with the teaching staff. Conferences are an excellent time to ask questions, voice concerns, and gain insight into your child's learning experience. We strive to schedule conferences at a time that is convenient for your family.

If you have any questions or concerns at any time, or if you would like to schedule an additional conference—in person or by phone—please reach out to your child's teacher. Open communication is essential, and we encourage parents to ask questions, no matter how small. We understand that this may be your child's first school experience, and we are here to support both you and your child throughout the journey.

Family Engagement Days

At Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center, we believe that family engagement plays a crucial role in a child's early learning experience. Family Engagement Days are designed to provide opportunities for parents, guardians, and caregivers to actively participate in their child's education, build connections with teachers and staff, and support learning beyond the classroom.

What to Expect on Family Engagement Days

- Interactive Activities: Families will have the opportunity to engage in hands-on activities alongside their child, reinforcing classroom learning.
- Learning Workshops: Sessions may include strategies to support early literacy, math skills, social-emotional learning, and motor development at home.
- School & Community Connections: Learn more about school programs, resources, and community services available to support your child's development.
- Special Events & Celebrations: Some Family Engagement Days may align with seasonal themes, classroom projects, or special school-wide initiatives.

Participation and Scheduling

Family Engagement Days are scheduled throughout the school year and will be communicated via the monthly school calendar, newsletters, and school emails. Participation is encouraged, and details on specific activities or any required sign-ups will be provided in advance.

TRANSPORTATION

Busing

To ensure a safe and smooth transportation experience, please make sure your child is ready when the bus arrives for pickup. If your child requires a booster seat or harness, a parent/guardian must secure them into the seat before the bus departs.

At drop-off, a recognized adult must be present to receive your child. On Wednesdays, early dismissal schedules are in effect, so please be at the bus stop at the designated Wednesday time.

For the safety of all passengers, please remind your child of the following bus expectations:

- Remain seated at all times and wear their seat belt properly.
- Use an inside voice to avoid distractions.
- Keep their backpack zipped and stored properly.
- Leave toys at home to prevent loss and distractions.

While bus transportation is provided, it is also a privilege. If a student is unable to remain seated and follow bus safety rules, alternative transportation may be required for the student's safety. Thank you for working with us to ensure a safe and enjoyable bus experience for all children.

Parent Transportation

Parent drop-off and pick-up take place at the main office doors at the following times:

- Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday: 8:15 AM & 12:25 PM
- Wednesday (Early Dismissal): 8:15 AM & 11:45 AM

Parents must park in the parking lot and walk their child to the main door. For safety reasons, children must be accompanied at all times during drop-off and pick-up. Thank you for following these procedures to ensure a safe and efficient arrival and dismissal process.