



2023–24

Minnewaska Area Schools

Early Childhood Family Education Handbook

ENGAGE EVERY STUDENT, EVERY DAY!



Welcome!

Our staff would like to take this opportunity to welcome you and your child to Minnewaska ECFE! Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten entrance. The program is offered through Minnesota public school districts. ECFE is funded through state aid, local levy, and participant fees.

ECFE's mission is to strengthen parents with young children through education and support. Our goal is to help parents provide the best possible environment for the healthy growth and development of their children. Through a variety of classes and early learning opportunities, Minnewaska Early Childhood is helping to build a strong foundation for the future and ensure that children are ready for Kindergarten.

It is vital for early childhood programs to assist parents in their role as primary educators of their children. Involving families prior to kindergarten enrollment encourages parents to play an active role in their children's learning in the elementary years and beyond.

We have a fantastic team of early childhood educators and assistants to support you and your children through these important first few years of life. We are happy to have you here!

Bill Mills, Community Education Director
320-239-4820 x1215
bmills@isd2149.org

Raquel Schmitz, Early Childhood Coordinator
320-239-1406
rschmitz@isd2149.org

Stephanie Thoen, Parent Educator
sthoen@isd2149.org

ECFE Class Format

At ECFE, we recognize the range of needs and interests in programming for families. Therefore, we offer a variety of one-time events, non-separating classes, and traditional ECFE classes. A traditional ECFE class includes three components: Parent & Child Interaction, Parent Education, and Children's Play time.

Parent-Child Interaction

At ECFE, a parent attends class with their student. The class is divided between parent-child interaction time and parent education time. Parent-child interaction provides parents and children opportunities to try developmentally-appropriate play and learning activities. Language development, literacy-based activities, and math readiness activities are introduced. Activities during parent-child interaction time promote healthy family relationships and offer parent teaching opportunities. This interaction time is planned so you may understand and enjoy your children by observing and playing with them.

The following guidelines will help you and your child experience a successful interaction time:

- Follow your child's lead. Visit activities your child is interested in first.
- Explore at your child's pace and continue to try other activities too.
- Include other parents and children in your interactions and activities. This shows your child how to be friendly with others.
- Verbalize--Use simple language to describe what is happening.
- Get down to your child's eye level by stooping or sitting on the floor.
- Reinforce. Stay positive. Establish a firm basis of support and trust.
- If an activity is full, encourage your child to try something else and come back.

Waiting is a good skill to learn.

- Be sure to reinforce putting toys away after use. This is an important self-help skill to learn, both at school and at home.
- Avoid using your cell phone during class. Please keep adult interaction to a minimum during Parent-Child Interaction.

Parent Education

The goal of parent education is to strengthen the parent-child relationship by providing relevant, effective education and support. Parent education is an opportunity for parents to discuss ideas and concerns ranging from child development to family relationships. The parent education component of ECFE provides a confidential environment where parents can make friends, share concerns, and gain knowledge. Using methods of adult learning such as observation, reflection, and discussion, parents find their confidence increases as they gain in knowledge and understanding of children's development and behavior. A licensed parent educator guides and facilitates group discussion, providing

information based on research and knowledge of child development and family education. Parents are encouraged to share their experiences and observations with the group. Sharing experiences helps decrease feelings of isolation and helps parents feel supported while they build and strengthen their relationships with their children, subsequently increasing their joy and satisfaction in their role.

Parent Education Group Guidelines

Parenting is a time for you to share your joys and challenges of being a parent.

Please remember:

- There are many good ways to be a parent, so try not to judge others.
- It is all right to share ideas from your discussions outside of the group, but please do not share names. Confidentiality is a must.
- This is your group and much of what you get out of it depends on what you put into it.
- Please silence your cell phones during class time and refrain from using cell phones for non-emergency calls and texts.

While parents are engaged in discussion led by the parent educator, children remain with the early childhood teacher in the classroom, as they continue to explore, play, and engage with their friends. For separating classes, parents will say a quick goodbye to their child then move to the parent education room for their discussion. Non-separating classes will have parenting discussion in the classroom.

Free Play/Learning Centers

While parents attend the parent education time, children spend time with their peers and trained staff practicing and learning about their own capabilities and social skills.

Play is the way in which children learn, and children learn best when they are doing just that! Because children learn through play, “learning centers” are a key component of our ECFE classrooms. These play opportunities focus on different aspects of your child’s learning and give them the opportunity to explore new concepts, ideas, and experiences. Students experience the following play and learning activities in the ECFE classroom: expressive activities, imaginative play, large motor activities, fine motor activities, thinking activities, and skills to encourage social and emotional development.

Circle Time

Circle time is led by the ECFE teacher. Circle time can include a greeting, “name song,” large group experience, finger plays, or movement activities. These activities help to build communication and listening skills. Children learn by repetition, so we will repeat songs and finger plays. We would like all children to participate at their own level, which means some children will join right in while others may wait a while. This is an opportunity for your child to become comfortable speaking and singing in

a large group. Parent participation at circle time is very important.

Tips for Circle Time

- Start circle time with your child in your lap or next to you.
- Expect that your child will stay and participate. If you suspect he/she won't, be sure to choose a spot near the back of the circle so you aren't disruptive when you follow the child.
- Encourage your child to join the circle and engage in the activities. Some children will get up and wander and that is okay. Staff will encourage children who wander from the circle to rejoin the circle and keep them safe in the classroom.
- We encourage you to repeat circle time activities at home. Children enjoy repetition and might feel more comfortable doing finger plays and songs at home.

ECFE A to Z

Absences – Please call or email your child's ECFE teacher when your child is going to be absent or late. This enables our program to ensure it is staffed appropriately for each class.

Allergies – If your child has any food or environmental allergies, please inform the ECFE teacher verbally and make sure to note it on your child's information form. Parents of children with food allergies should provide an alternate snack for their children on days needed.

Arrival and Departure – Please try to arrive no more than five minutes before class time. Teachers are preparing for the day's activities and the classroom doors will be closed.

Attendance – Parents must attend classes with their children as this is a parent-child program. If a parent cannot attend a class with the child, another family member may bring the child to class; that family member must also attend class. Please contact ECFE staff if you are unable to attend.

Behavior Guidance – We will be firm, fair, friendly and consistent while teaching your child to be respectful, responsible and safe. In order to do this, we will:

- Approach a child at eye level
- Use positive language
- Provide "OK" choices
- Acknowledge feelings and behaviors, and redirect as needed
- Connect with each child individually everyday
- Allow children to work and process information at their own pace
- Teach problem-solving versus providing solutions
- Make adaptations for individuals as needed
- Not allow children to hurt, be hurt, or destroy property

Beverages and Snacks for Parents – During parent discussion time, coffee and tea are made available. Some groups bring treats for parent education class on a weekly basis.

Birthday Policy - If you would like to bring something else to celebrate your child's birthday, please notify the teacher in advance. A birthday "treat" must be store bought and in its original packaging.

Building Safety - Please walk together with your child in the building. Children need to walk, not run, in the building. Be considerate of classes in session as you walk to and from class, and be as quiet as possible.

Cell Phones – ECFE classes are an opportunity to spend quality time with your child and focus on your parenting skills. Please silence your cell phones during class time and refrain from using cell phones for non-emergency calls and texts.

Clothing – To help your child feel free to participate fully in all activities, we suggest that children are dressed in comfortable, washable play clothes. Paint smocks are provided for messy activities, but accidents do occur. Tennis shoes or shoes with rubber soles allow your child to jump and climb with greater ease and safety. Please remember to bring shoes during the winter months when your child comes to school wearing boots.

Cubbies– Cubbies are available to hang up coats and diaper bags. It is recommended that you keep purses with you at all times. The ECFE program is not responsible for lost or stolen items.

Curriculum – The Minnesota Department of Education's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress state standards act as a framework for our instruction.

Donations –Donations are welcome at Minnewaska ECFE! We appreciate any donated items that are used in the children's classroom and parent room. We accept beverage donations such as coffee, tea, hot chocolate, water, etc. These items will be available for parents during parent discussion time. Please speak to a teacher for a list of additional supplies or items that may be needed.

Drills – As per Minnesota state law, the following drills will be held annually: Fire, Tornado/Severe Weather, and Lockdown drills. Parents and children are asked to follow the staff's directions during these drills. Parents with children in sibling care should remain with the child enrolled in a class.

ECFE Closings – ECFE is closed for all Minnewaska Area Schools holidays, winter, spring, and summer breaks. Weather related announcements are also posted on the Minnewaska Area Schools website at www.minnewaska.k12.mn.us

If school is two hours late, there will be no morning classes; evening classes will still meet.

If school closes early, there will be no evening classes.

If school is closed, both morning and evening classes will be canceled.

Germs & Toys – Help us reduce the amount of germs spread by washing your hands before and after class, and by placing toys that have found their way into your child's mouth into the "mouthed toy bucket". We will wash these items before they are used again.

Health Policies – Out of respect for others, if you or your child are sick, we ask that you please stay home. If your child will not be attending class, please call the ECFE classroom.

Please keep your child home if she/he has:

- Oral temp of 100°F or higher- Keep child home at least 24 hours after it returns to normal.
- Vomiting or diarrhea has taken place in the previous 24 hours. If your child has thrown up during the night-Keep the child home EVEN if they feel fine in the morning. Often vomiting is the first symptom of a disease that develops later. This is usually the most contagious time for the other children.
- Draining or inflammation of ears or eyes (including Pink Eye)
- Sore Throat-may also be accompanied by chills, fever, earache, or the throat is bright red or contains white spots. See your doctor and keep your child home as long as the doctor recommends. (Including Strep throat infection)
- An undiagnosed or contagious rash
- Cough that is interfering or limiting their activity

In order to provide a healthy environment for everyone, you will be asked to leave if your child appears ill.

Lending Library – Our Lending Library is filled with books for children ages birth through five years old. There are board books, lift the flap books, picture books, and classic hard cover stories. We also have a selection of parenting books available for families to check out.

Mandated Reporting – Staff are mandated by state law to report any instance of observed or suspected neglect and physical or sexual abuse of children in the home, school, or community setting.

Parent Advisory Board – Parents/Guardians are encouraged to become actively involved in the Parent Advisory Board. The Advisory Board supports early childhood programming and provides opportunities for parents/guardians and school staff to work together for the betterment of the program and its students. Contact the Early Childhood Coordinator for more information.

Parking – Please park in the first two rows of the parking lot which are labeled for ECFE families.

Photo or Video Policy – Parent's permission must be obtained before any parent or child is videotaped or photographed for use in publications. The permission/release is included on the ECFE registration form.

Restroom Procedures – A restroom is located in the ECFE classroom. In addition, an adult bathroom is located down the hall from the classrooms. All children will be accompanied by an adult. It is recommended that parents take their child to the restroom before class time and change diapers if necessary. The changing table is located in the ECFE classroom. All used diapers must be wrapped in a plastic bag before disposal.

Separation Suggestions – Separation anxiety, the feeling of anxiousness or worry when a parent leaves a child's sight, is a sign of normal, healthy child development. It shows that children are dealing with issues of separateness, uniqueness, and independence. Separation may be difficult for some children. The ECFE staff is here to provide a safe, caring environment for both parent and child to work on the normal developmental process of separation. Most children who show initial distress at separation calm down quickly. If a child is having a harder time with separation, the staff will work with the parent to develop a plan that is comfortable for everyone. We offer you the following suggestions:

- Talk to your child about going to school. By preparing your child ahead of time, the adjustment will be easier. Describe what he/ she will be doing in "his/her" classroom while you are in "yours".
- Walk with your children to the classroom rather than carry them.
- Many children have a special toy or blanket that they cherish. It is a wonderful idea to bring this item along to help the transition.
- Stay in the children's room until you have involved your child in an activity. When it is time for you to leave, make your farewell brief and cheerful.
- Give your child adequate time to adjust to the routine of your leaving class each session. Hopefully you should see that it becomes easier from week to week for both you and your child.

Sibling Care Policy – Sibling care is provided for children whose parent is attending an ECFE class. The goal of sibling care is to provide a safe, supervised environment for siblings of children in classes with their parents. A monitored adult/child ratio is maintained to assure quality care for each child. Please share any special instructions for the day with staff and label all items that are being left, such as bottles, sippy cups, pacifiers, diaper bags, etc.

Snacks – Healthy snacks are an important element in our program. Snack time is a social time that encourages self-help skills and conversation with others. Parents are asked to sign up for a date to provide snack items. A sign-up sheet will be passed around during the first week of class. All snacks must be store bought and in the unopened original wrapper. If your child has any food allergies, please notify the teacher or other staff.

Below are ideas for healthy snacks:

- Fruit (apples, bananas, oranges, grapes, berries)
- Applesauce or other fruit cups
- String cheese
- Jell-O or pudding cups

- Yogurt
- Granola bars
- Pretzels
- Whole grain crackers
- Animal crackers
- Dried fruit/raisins

Staff requirements/qualifications – All parent educators and ECCE teachers are licensed and certified through the Minnesota Department of Education. Continuing Education and staff in-services are available throughout the school year for all staff.