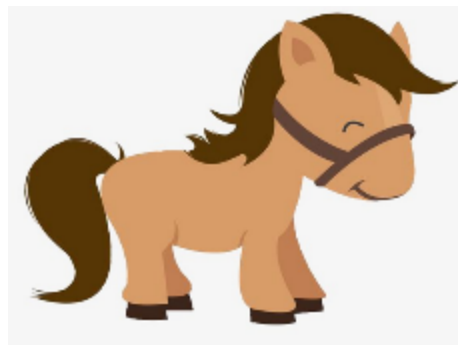




**Gadsden Independent School District
Early Childhood Department
Family Handbook
2021-2022**



On Track PreK Center Contact Information

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Department of Special Education	500 N. 4 th St Anthony, NM 88021	575-882-6221
Estrella Burciaga Early Childhood Director	4950 McNutt Rd. Sunland Park, NM 88063	575-882-6234
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GAC On Track PreK Sandy Silvas, Site Specialist	4950 McNutt Rd. Sunland Park, NM 88063	575-882-6740 575-386-5576
Anthony On Track PreK Angelic Ramos, Site Specialist	609 Church St Anthony, NM 88021	575-882-1904 575-208-4281
Chaparral On Track PreK Nathalie Urbina, Site Specialist	800 County Line Dr Chaparral, NM 88081	575-824-5382 575-386-5290
La Mesa On Track PreK Viola Ramos, Site Specialist	253 E. Chimuri La Mesa, NM 88044	575-233-3475 575-201-3634
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Dear Early Childhood Friends and Families,

Welcome to the GISD Early Childhood Program!

Our Early Childhood program has been in existence for over 15 years. We strive to give children the fundamentals for a successful school journey. We firmly believe that early intervention and educational experiences make a difference in the lives of our children and families.

This Family Handbook has been prepared to help answer any questions you might have about our program. Teachers will review this document with you at your initial home visit. Our goal, through this handbook, is that you become well acquainted with our program and all its benefits.

As we begin this new journey together, we look forward to working with you to develop your child's social-emotional and academic skills. Please let us know how we can partner with you in meeting your child's needs.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call us at (915) 412-5033. We look forward to working with you to make your child's first learning experience a success.

Sincerely,

Early Childhood Leadership Team

Gadsden Independent School District

Department of Early Childhood

Family Handbook

Mascot

Pony

School Colors

Teal and Khaki

Philosophy

The Gadsden Early Childhood Program will provide the essentials your child needs for school success. We strive to help your child grow and develop early literacy skills that will set a strong foundation as they enter their school career. A great emphasis is also placed on helping students develop positive relationships with others as they become confident, independent individuals. Through a variety of developmentally appropriate experiences we will ensure that your child gains lifelong skills that will guarantee a “Winning Beginning!”

Goals

There are three main goals for the Gadsden Early Childhood Program:

- To provide a voluntary quality Early Childhood Program that meets the physical, social-emotional, and cognitive needs of all students
- Offer Early Childhood services that focus on increasing early literacy skills including oral language and school readiness
- Partner with parents and families to identify and develop common goals to help each child reach their full potential

Gadsden Early Childhood Centers and Satellite Classrooms

On Track Pre-K Center Sunland Park (GAC)(4Y)

Sunland Park Elementary (3Y/4Y) Satellite classrooms

Riverside Elementary (3Y/4Y) Satellite classrooms

Santa Teresa Elementary (3Y) Satellite classroom

Santa Teresa High School (4Y) Satellite classroom

On Track Pre-K Center Anthony (3Y/4Y)

La Union Elementary (3Y) Satellite Classroom

On Track Pre-K Center La Mesa (3Y/4Y)

Desert Pride Academy (3Y) Satellite Classroom

Gadsden High School (4Y) Satellite Classroom

On Track Pre-K Center Chaparral (4Y)

Desert Trail Elementary (3Y/4Y) Satellite Classrooms

Early Childhood Programs Eligibility

Preschool 3Y

Children that are 3 years old by August 31st of each school year **or** children who have turned 3 years old and have been identified by a Part C agency such as New Mexico Family Infant, Toddler Program (NM FIT), various birth-to-three programs and/or agencies, or were identified through the district's Child Find process.

PreK 4Y-Children that are 4 years old by August 31st of each school year.

Recruitment Procedures

The Gadsden Early Childhood Program has developed and implemented a recruitment process that is designed to actively inform all families with age eligible children within the recruitment area. This process includes but is not limited to the following activities:

- Share Early Childhood Program information on GISD website
- Share Early Childhood Program information through GISD social media sites such as Facebook
- Post flyers within the community and work with district elementary schools to distribute flyers and other Gadsden Early Childhood Program information
- Contact current Gadsden Early Childhood Program families with other age eligible children
- Contact current Gadsden Early Childhood Program families with referrals
- Contact current waiting list families to update their application
- Partner with the *Gadsden Early Childhood Coalition*

Selection

- The selection process is designed to ensure that the Gadsden Early Childhood Program enrolls children who are eligible and in the greatest developmental need of Preschool services.
- A developmental screening is utilized to determine student strengths and needs in all areas of development. The Gadsden Early Childhood Program prioritizes student enrollment by selecting students who display a delay in developmental abilities.

Enrollment Procedures

- Applications are taken continuously throughout the year online at:
 - http://www.gisd.k12.nm.us/gisd_registration_online
- In the event that the program is full, a waiting list will be created. If a slot becomes available, eligible families from the waiting list will immediately be contacted by Gadsden Early Childhood office staff.
- During enrollment, families will make an appointment with front office staff to deliver required documents.
- Required documents are as follows:
 1. Proof of Age (or approved Affidavit)
 2. Proof of required immunizations
 3. Proof of address within Gadsden ISD boundaries
 4. Registration form
 5. Emergency card information
 6. Home Language Survey
- For disenrollment, parents or guardians are asked to complete a Disenrollment Statement to verify the child will no longer be enrolled in the program.

Student Attendance

Each school day provides your child with an opportunity to learn important skills that are essential for his/her future success. Therefore, it is very important that your child attends school daily. We ask that appointments be scheduled after school hours or on days when our students will not be

attending classes. If your child is ill and needs to be absent, please make sure to call the office to report your child's absence.

In the event that your child is absent and you have not notified the office staff, you will be contacted by a Pre-K staff member. If excessive absenteeism occurs, you will be contacted by Site Specialist and an attendance letter documenting the student's absences will be distributed to family. If excessive absenteeism continues, a conference with parents will be held. During this conference, a committee, to include the parent, will design a plan to improve student attendance.

Early Student Release

If a student needs to go home early, a parent or designee listed on your emergency card, with proper I.D., must come pick up the student. The person picking up the student must be an adult, 18 years or older. Please ensure that emergency telephone numbers are working and updated. Children will only be released with the parent/guardian's permission. Students must be picked up at the office.

Days and Hours of Operation

The Gadsden On Track Early Childhood Programs offer a half-day schedule for preschool (3Y) classrooms and a full day schedule for PreK (4Y) classrooms. Specific days of operation are on the Early Childhood calendar. Parents are given a school calendar during the home visit or registration. Daily start and end times vary according to the On Track Early Childhood center the child attends.

Transportation Procedures

Families provide transportation for students enrolled in our Early Childhood Program. Boone Transportation Company provides busing for students who are eligible. Every bus has a designated bus monitor who rides with the children to and from school. Buses are inspected for safety. In addition, bus evacuation practice will be scheduled for staff and children.

As per Boone Transportation's policy, children will only be released to designated adults (18 years or older). If you or the designated adult cannot meet your child at the bus stop, please call the school and let them know.

If you are not at the bus stop the student will be returned to school, and the office staff will:

- Attempt to call someone to pick up your child. Calls will be made to those individuals listed on the emergency card.
- If we cannot find a person to take responsibility and pick-up your child in a timely manner, as per New Mexico State Law, the appropriate law enforcement agency will be notified, and your child will be released to them.

Bus Cancellations/Delayed Start In the event that it becomes necessary to delay the start of a school day due to weather or other circumstances, Gadsden ISD has implemented a standardized procedure to cover a "Delayed Start Announcement". Should it be necessary to implement a delayed start, Gadsden ISD officials will send a school wide notification through REMIND or other approved district apps. The local media sources will be contacted to broadcast that "Gadsden ISD schools will be on a delayed start of school". This announcement will trigger the following predetermined actions:

- 3Y A.M. session CLASSES WILL BE CANCELLED
- 4Y -Full Day Classrooms will be on a 2-hour delay
- PARENTS AND CHILD CARE PROVIDERS THAT DROP OFF CHILDREN WILL DROP OFF AFTERNOON STUDENTS AT THEIR NORMAL TIME. AFTERNOON BUS WILL RUN AT NORMAL TIME.
- ALL GISD ON TRACK STAFF WILL REPORT TWO (2) HOURS LATER THAN THEIR NORMAL REPORTING TIME
- IF WE ENCOUNTER A SECOND DAY FOR A DELAYED START, AFTERNOON CLASSES WILL BE CANCELLED. MORNING

CLASSES AND BUSES WILL BEGIN TWO (2) HOURS LATER
THAN THEIR NORMAL REPORTING TIME

Field Trips Buses will not be available to pick up/drop off students on field trip days. Parents will have to drop students off at school where the bus will be waiting to transport students to the field trip location. Only students enrolled at On-Track Early Childhood programs will be able to ride the bus.

Curriculum

All 3Y early childhood programs use the Opening the World of Learning (OWL) curriculum. All 4Y early childhood programs use the Three Cheers for Pre K curriculum. These evidence-based curriculums are comprehensive and equitable in English and Spanish and 100% aligned to New Mexico Early Childhood Essential Indicators.

The Gadsden On Track Early Childhood Program follows the FOCUS essential elements of quality. FOCUS is the NM Public Education (PED) approved quality rating and improvement system that promotes high quality, inclusive programs and practices. The **New Mexico PreK Program Standards** and the **NM Early Learning Guidelines (ELGS)** were identified to help educators assist each child to reach his or her maximum potential. They are used to communicate clearly with families about how their child is growing and learning; what steps are being taken to enhance his or her early learning experience, and to address the family's goals and concerns.

These guidelines can be found here:

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/New-Mexico-Early-Learning-Guidelines-June-2020.pdf>

PreK philosophy of teaching and learning is based on the theory of using Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). Using DAP, the PreK day is centered around increasing areas of development through intentional planning and interactions with students. Goals are created based on

student level of development. Teachers intentionally plan and develop strategies, to partner with families to meet students' individual needs.

Literacy Practices

The students are placed in a bilingual setting using English and Spanish. Stories, songs and games will be taught in both languages. Oral language development, concept development and readiness skills will be taught in the child's native language throughout the daily schedule, transitions, and routines. The GISD Early Childhood Program uses the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Curriculum to supplement the comprehensive evidence based curriculums to target the following areas of literacy development:

1. Phonological awareness strategies
2. Oral language and vocabulary strategies
3. Alphabet knowledge instruction
4. Read-alouds that incorporate comprehension strategies
5. Individual and small group read alouds
6. Large group read-alouds. Half or more of the children may rotate large group time; however, these groups must occur daily; and
7. Opportunities for developmentally appropriate writing.

Assessments

There are many ways developmental growth and learning of each child is monitored. One tool for determining current levels of performance, known as **Ages and Stages Developmental Screening**, is conducted within the first three months of enrollment. The primary assessment tool used by the GISD Early Childhood Programs is the **NM PreK Early Childhood Observational Tool (ECOT)**. These assessments are available in English and Spanish. They are used to develop individual student goals and monitor student progress. The results of these assessments and observations are shared with parents during Parent Teacher Conferences.

Health Screenings and Procedures

The Public Education Department requires On Track children to have the following health screenings:

- Vision
- Hearing
- Dental
- Physical

The Gadsden Early Childhood Program provides these screenings free to our students. Screening results indicating health concerns are shared with parents when the examinations are complete. Parents are encouraged to discuss the screening results with their family doctor. Families are requested to provide follow-up information to program staff.

If a family chooses not to accept these health screenings provided by the district, the family must provide the office staff with evidence that a qualified provider has given the student the same health examinations.

Safety

Students need to practice good safety habits at all times. School, bus, and playground rules are established so students will be safe. Toy guns, lighters, knives or other potentially dangerous articles are prohibited.

Discipline

Our rules concerning discipline promote the health, safety, and well being of each child. We focus on making good choices, being respectful to our school, to others and to ourselves. A great emphasis is placed on teaching problem solving skills, dealing with feelings and emotions, and self-regulation.

Gadsden On Track Early Childhood Program believes in positively promoting the social-emotional and behavioral development of ALL children. Any child enrolled at any On Track Early Childhood center will **NOT** be suspended, dis-enrolled, or expelled for any behavioral or

disciplinary reason. School personnel will work together with families in developing and implementing developmentally appropriate strategies to best support students. If concerning behaviors continue, school personnel and families may begin early intervention through the Child Find process as discussed in the Special Education section of this handbook.

Backpacks

In order to help students during arrival and departure times, it may be necessary for a GISD Early Childhood program staff member to open/close and place or take out items from your child's backpack.

Celebrations

Throughout the school year, students are exposed to a variety of cultures and traditional holidays. Through planned activities and events, children will have the opportunity to learn from those whose life experiences differ from their own.

Birthdays are very special to many of our families. Parents and families are welcome to celebrate their child's birthday in the classroom with prior teacher notification. Celebrations will take place during the last 15 minutes of the school day on the day of your child's birthday. If you would like to bring food items to share, please make sure the items are store bought.

If you do not celebrate birthdays or holidays, please communicate with your teacher.

Family Engagement

Family engagement is a continuous process that increases active participation, communication and collaboration between parents, school and community with the goal of educating the whole child to ensure student achievement and success.

As a parent, you are encouraged to be involved with the Gadsden Early Childhood Program. Please refer to the **Family Engagement Activity Calendar** provided. Every month you have the opportunity to take part in your child's education.

These activities include:

- Home Visits- Teachers visit student's home to meet the family and give an introduction to the Early Childhood program.
- Open House- Students and families visit the classrooms to meet with teachers and staff
- Parent Orientation
- Field Trips
- Family/Teacher Conferences
- Family Evening Activities (science, art, literacy)
- Trike-a-Thon
- Parenting Classes
- Winter and End-of -Year Program

There are many opportunities for the home and GISD Early Childhood Program to communicate in person or virtually.

- Monthly newsletters
- Parent/family bulletin boards
- Remind
- Google Meets

We encourage you to attend parent meetings, participate in family events and be an active participant in your child's education. Remember, you are always welcome to visit your child's class. If you wish to visit, please make

arrangements with your child's teacher and obtain a visitor's pass from the front office. Following district guidelines, any visitors/volunteers who assist in a class more than five (5) times per semester will need to complete a Volunteer Packet. Please see the On Track PreK office for more information.

Family/Teacher Conferences

Three Family/Teacher conferences will occur throughout the school year. Families will be notified and will select a few preferred time slots. Teachers will try to accommodate families and set up an appointment with families on the designated Family/Teacher conference days. During the conference, teachers will share the Family/Teacher summary report and the family and teacher will discuss goals for the student. Teachers may share resources from NM PreK as students' goals are discussed. Meetings are scheduled every 20-30 minutes in your child's classroom. Please rest assured that all information is kept confidential.

Field Trips

Field Trips are an extension of classroom instruction and program goals. All field trips will comply with state laws and regulations concerning the transportation of students. Permission slips are required for each trip. This is a special time for parents and their preschool child. We highly encourage parents to find alternative childcare for siblings. Older siblings enrolled at GISD will not be allowed to attend Preschool field trips.

Transition into and out of PreK

In order to enhance the continuity of children as they move from home to Preschool/Pre-K and then from Pre-K to kindergarten, activities are planned to address the transitional needs of families and children. These activities are as follows:

- The transition from home to Preschool/Pre-K begins with the home visit in which teachers review the parent handbook and help families become acquainted with the program.

- Open House occurs at your child's classroom during the beginning of the school year, to help families and students become oriented with the classroom environment. Families meet with teachers and staff.
- A variety of Parent Engagement activities are planned throughout the year.
- Three Parent/Teacher Conferences scheduled during the year to ensure a collaborative partnership between home and family. During the conference, families and teachers will develop common goals and discuss the progress of each child.
- The Gadsden Early Childhood Program collaborates with elementary schools to provide parents information about Kindergarten registration and requirements as the Pre-K year draws to a close.
- Students and parents are invited to attend a transition to Kinder event, where kindergarten teachers and elementary principals meet with parents to set expectations and answer questions.
- The year- round implementation of the Early Learning Guidelines ensures that students develop the skills necessary to successfully transition into PreK and Kindergarten.
- PreK and Kindergarten teachers will have access to assessment data through the Early Childhood Observation Tool.

Special Education Procedures Plan

GISD follows the special education process established under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) rules to determine if a child meets the qualifications for special education and related services.

The Gadsden Early Childhood Program provides special education services to children ages three to five who qualify under IDEA in one of thirteen eligibility categories, or as developmentally delayed, and have the need for specially designed instruction. Students who qualify for special education services are eligible to receive services beginning on their third birthday, regardless of when it falls within the school year. Further, the GISD Early Childhood program works in collaboration with the district's

Child Find Services in referring enrolled Preschool and PreK children who may have disabilities and need special education services.

Screening All GISD Early Childhood student's receive a developmental screening within the first three months of the school year using the Ages and Stages Developmental Screening which includes a Social-Emotional section. The results are reviewed during the 1st Parent/Teacher conference. If there is an area of concern, the parent and teacher will work together to monitor the student's progress and consider further action as needed. Children who are found exhibiting concerns per the developmental screenings may be referred for a special education evaluation in all areas of suspected delay/disability.

Referral If concerns regarding your child's development are still present, a referral for an evaluation may be made by the parent or other individuals (teacher, community agencies, physicians, etc.) by calling the district's Child Find office at (575) 882-6221 or by submitting a Child Find Referral Intake Form available at the GISD On Track site. If a referral is made by someone other than the parent, the parent/guardian will be notified first. The child's family will be contacted by the district's Child Find personnel within 30 days of receiving the referral to schedule an appointment with parents. Parents will be given a copy and explanation of the *Parents and Child Rights in Special Education* and asked to sign consent to conduct an individual evaluation to determine if the child is eligible for special education services. Children who are referred to Child Find are monitored by On Track staff who are provided with appropriate strategies to support the child's learning until the evaluation is completed and eligibility for services is determined.

Evaluation Prior to the evaluation, a hearing and vision screening is conducted by a district Health Assistant. Upon completion of the vision and hearing screening, the evaluation will be scheduled by the educational diagnostician assigned to the child's home campus. The child's evaluation team will complete the evaluation within 60 days of the parent signing consent and an evaluation report written. The educational diagnostician will schedule an Eligibility Determination/ Individualized Education Program

(IEP) team meeting with the family to review the results and determine if services are needed.

Eligibility Determination/ IEP Team Meeting A group of qualified professionals who are familiar with your child (general education teacher, special education teacher, administrator, related services providers, etc.) and parents (the IEP team) meets to discuss the evaluation results and decide if your child meets the eligibility criteria for special education and or related services. If so, the IEP team meeting continues to develop and finalize your child's IEP. If a translator or interpreter is needed, please notify school staff as soon as possible to ensure availability of district personnel.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) An IEP document must be developed for any child who meets the criteria for one or more disabilities and is determined to be in need of special education services. The IEP describes how the child learns and best demonstrates that learning, and what educators and other service providers must and will do to help your child learn, develop new skills, and participate in age appropriate activities. The IEP has stated goals and objectives, details accommodations and modifications that correspond to your child's needs and indicates placement for learning in the least restrictive environment. The IEP must be reviewed and updated by the IEP team at least annually.

Students who Enter with an IEP In some instances, children enter our program with an active IEP from another district or State. A temporary IEP will be developed and implemented for 30 days to give the child's IEP team time to conduct a Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED), needed evaluations and/or to develop a new IEP.

Classroom Placement The Gadsden Early Childhood program believes in the **Full Participation** of EACH child. Our classrooms provide an inclusive environment for ALL early childhood students. We believe every child brings diverse strengths in their family's culture, language, beliefs and circumstances. We will work hard to promote a sense of belonging, supporting positive social relationships, and work together with families to ensure success for every child. The demographics and ratio of each classroom is based on the individual needs of each child.

The GISD Early Childhood Program provides ancillary services (e.g. speech/language, physical and or occupational therapy) on site, in the classroom (***Natural Environment***) and within regular program activities and routines as indicated in each child's IEP.

Meals at School

- All food must be prepared by the school district nutrition staff.
- Every child is provided a free lunch.
- All children eat with their classmates.

In Conclusion

We look forward to working with you and hope to build a positive relationship that will enhance your child's learning. Please remember that there are many ways for families to be part of our school community such as: attending family engagement events, in person and/or virtual parent meetings, and by participating in your child's learning activities. Please remember that the Gadsden Early Childhood Program values your ideas and input.