

PARENT'S HANDBOOK

www.steppingstonesearlylearning.com

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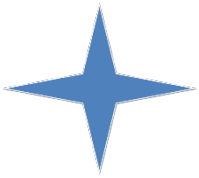
Learning Beyond Paper is a hands-on, play-based curriculum that helps children build literacy, math, science, language, social-emotional, and critical-thinking skills through engaging STEAM experiences that nurture the whole child and prepare them for lifelong success.

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STEPPING STONES EARLY LEARNING ACADEMY MISSION STATEMENT:
Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy's mission is to create a positive foundation for children to develop independence and strengthen their social and emotional skills through learning about God's love, and God's Creation.

VISION:
To instill a lifetime love of learning in all children.

Core Values:



The S.T.A.R. Principals:

S-Safety: Safety is of utmost concern at SSELA.
T-Transparency: In addition to Safety, Transparency is an extremely high priority for all faculty and staff. Each team member at SSELA Commits to transparency and partnership with each family to benefit each student individually.
A-Attitude: All faculty and staff at SSELA have a positive attitude to best love and care for your children in accordance with the Stepping Stones Standards.
R-Respect: It is our responsibility to best serve our families and students while treating them with respect. We are aware that we are building the foundation for the future and carry the burden of that responsibility accordingly.

HOURS AND DAYS: SSELA's Hours of Operation are Monday through Friday, 7:15-5:15.

SSELA will CLOSE in observance of the following holidays:

- Christmas Break
- MLK Day
- Presidents Day
- Spring Break (Wednesday-Friday)
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Week of July 4th-summer break
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Break (Wednesday-Friday)

NOTE: If holidays fall on a weekend day, the following weekday will result in school closure due to observance of the holiday. These holidays will be decided annually in January and will be posted for your convenience. All holidays are charged at the regular rate.
Our School Calendar will be updated monthly, and published in the newsletter. Please see your front office if you need the most updated copy of our latest Calendar!

WEATHER DAYS:

SSELA will follow the closures of Okaloosa County Schools. Weather days will be charged at our regular rate. As frustrating as it is when weather closures arise, we have no control over the weather and how Okaloosa County Schools choose to handle the situation.

OTHER CLOSURES:
Due to state training requirements, SSELA will be closed for a minimum of 2 days during the year for teacher in-service training. This will be in the form of one day in the summer and one day in the fall. These days will be decided in January of each year and will be posted for your convenience. You will be charged the regular rate for the weeks these days fall.

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STATE LICENSING

We understand the importance of maintaining strict compliance with state licensing regulations to ensure a safe, high-quality environment for your children. Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy (SSELA) is licensed and regulated by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Our license numbers are listed on the front cover of this handbook and are also posted at each school location, as required by law.

For more information about our licensing status, or to learn more about child care regulations in Florida, please visit the DCF Child Care website at www.myflfamilies.com/childcare or call the DCF Child Care Licensing office at **1-888-352-2842**.

If you have concerns or wish to file a complaint regarding our program, you may contact the DCF Child Care Licensing office directly using the information above.

Parent Grievance and Complaint Process

At SSELA, we believe in open communication, partnership, and transparency with all families. We are committed to working together to resolve concerns and find common ground, while upholding the policies and standards that keep our school community safe and supportive.

If you have a concern, grievance, or complaint, please follow these steps:

Step 1: Submit Your Concern in Writing to the Director

If you have a concern or complaint regarding your child's experience, classroom, or any aspect of our program, please submit your concern in writing (email is preferred) directly to your school's Director. Clearly describe the issue, including any relevant dates, times, and individuals involved. The Director will review your concern and respond in a timely manner, working with you to address and resolve the issue.

Step 2: Escalation to Leadership Team

If you feel your concern has not been adequately addressed by the Director, or if the issue requires further attention, you may escalate your grievance by submitting a written request to a member of the SSELA Leadership Team. The Leadership Team will review your concern, facilitate communication between all parties, and work to mediate or reconcile differences as needed.

SSELA is committed to listening to all parent concerns and finding solutions whenever possible, while still enforcing the rules and policies that ensure the well-being of all students and staff. Our goal is to maintain a positive, respectful environment for every family.

If you have questions about this process or need assistance, please contact the school office.

Required Parent Brochures

As part of our commitment to keeping families informed and in compliance with Florida law, Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy (SSELA) provides all parents and guardians with the following brochures each year:

- **"Know Your Child Care Facility"**
- **"Child Care Facility Brochure: Influenza Virus"**

These brochures are distributed to all families upon enrollment and are available annually each February during our registration renewal process. Additional copies are always available in the front office and can also be accessed online at the Florida Department of Children and Families website: www.myflfamilies.com/childcare.

If you have any questions about these brochures or need another copy, please contact the school office.

Emergency Procedures and Evacuation Plans

The safety of your child(ren) is our highest priority. Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy (SSELA) has comprehensive emergency procedures in place for a variety of situations, including fire, severe weather (such as hurricanes or tornadoes), lockdowns, and other emergencies.

Fire and Evacuation:

We conduct regular fire and evacuation drills as required by state law. In the event of a fire or other situation requiring evacuation, children and staff will exit the building quickly and safely using designated routes. **Primary and secondary evacuation routes are posted in each classroom and common area for staff and students to follow.** Parents will be notified via ProCare and/or Email as soon as possible.

Severe Weather (Hurricane/Tornado):

If a tornado or severe weather warning is issued, children will be moved to the safest area of the building, away from windows and exterior doors. SSELA follows Okaloosa County Schools for weather-related closures and will notify parents as soon as possible. During the summer, when School is closed, SSELA management will use best judgement to ensure school safety in the event of severe weather.

Lockdown:

In the event of a security threat or lockdown situation, all doors will be secured, and children will be kept in safe areas under staff supervision until authorities give an all-clear. No one will be allowed to enter or leave the building during a lockdown.

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Parent Notification:
Parents will be notified of any emergency situation as quickly as possible via the ProCare app, phone call, and/or email. Please ensure your contact information is always up to date.

Reunification:
After an evacuation or emergency, children will only be released to parents or authorized individuals listed on the child's emergency contact form. Please bring a photo ID for verification. If we have relocated off-site, the reunification location and instructions will be communicated to you through ProCare and by phone.
If you have questions about our emergency procedures or would like to review our full Emergency Preparedness Plan, please contact the school office.

Cell-phone Free Zones
All SSELA schools are cell-phone free zones. Due to strict federal and state privacy and confidentiality laws, we are required to strictly enforce this rule for our staff and parents visiting the school. All staff on premises are issued tablets to use ProCare on and message back and forth with the parents. Cell phones are to be completely turned off prior to entering the school for any reason. If a staff member sees you in the school while on your cell phone, he or she may kindly ask you to put it away for the duration of your time in the school. Failure to comply with this rule will result in the school not allowing you access inside while you are completing your business on the phone. Admin will have a cell phone to communicate with the staff during the day for breaks etc.

STATEMENT OF SERVICES:
Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy (SSELA) is a structured year-round program that offers all day care and education for children 3 months to 5 years of age. Our daily activities and curriculum have been created to provide diversity and challenge our students based upon the specific age group. Specifically, our activities include preparation for our students' transition to school, arts and crafts, games, music, outdoor play, weekly chapel and story time. We offer multiple packages depending on the specific needs of our families. The packages include, but are not limited to:

- Full time 5 days a week (M-F 7:15-5:15)
- Full time 3 days a week (M/W/F 7:15-5:15)
- Part time 3 days a week (M/W/F 8:30-2:30)
- Full time 2 days a week (T/R 7:15-5:15)
- Part time 2 days a week (T/R 8:30-2:30)

Rates are not published in the parent's handbook but are available to our clients from the front office by request.

Transportation Policy
Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy (SSELA) does not provide transportation services for children. This includes, but is not limited to, transportation for field trips, special events, or daily pick-up and drop-off.
Parents and guardians are responsible for arranging all transportation for their child(ren) to and from our facilities.

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Program:
At SSELA, we are a contracted VPK (Voluntary Prekindergarten) provider in partnership with the Early Learning Coalition. Our VPK program is designed to prepare four-year-olds for kindergarten by building a strong foundation in early literacy, math, and social skills.
The VPK program at SSELA typically runs from the beginning of September through the first week of May. VPK days are held on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 8:15 AM to 2:15 PM.
VPK is a voucher-based program. To participate, families must obtain a VPK voucher from the Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast (ELC). Vouchers can be obtained by visiting the ELC website at www.elc-ec.org or by contacting their office directly for assistance with the application process.
Attendance in the VPK program is extremely important. Consistent attendance is required by the Early Learning Coalition, and failure to attend regularly may result in removal from the program. If your child is absent, please notify the school as soon as possible.
For more information about VPK eligibility, enrollment, or attendance requirements, please contact the school office or visit the Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast website.

School Readiness Program:
SSELA participates in the School Readiness program, a needs-based, tuition subsidy program funded by the State of Florida and administered through the Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast (ELC). The School Readiness program is designed to help eligible families with the cost of childcare, so parents can work or attend school while ensuring their children receive quality early learning experiences.
School Readiness is a voucher-based program. Families who qualify for assistance will receive a voucher that can be used toward tuition at SSELA. Eligibility is determined by the ELC based on family income, employment or educational status, and other factors.

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To apply for School Readiness assistance, or to check your eligibility, please visit the Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast website at www.elc-ec.org or contact their office directly for guidance and support with the application process.
If you have questions about how School Readiness works at SSELA or need help getting started, please contact our school office. We are happy to assist you in navigating the process.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS:
Enrollment in our program is open to all families in our community. We operate on a non-discriminatory basis. No one shall be excluded from any of our programs because of race, color, religion, disability, sex or national origin. Only the child(ren)'s parent or legal guardian may enroll a child(ren) (Proof of custody may be required). All forms provided to you upon enrollment must be completed before your child may attend SSELA. All requested personal information is kept confidential in accordance with the state and federal privacy laws. Parents are required to update all emergency data as needed, including address, home, cell and work numbers and individuals authorized to pick up your child. Current immunization information must be submitted to the school upon enrollment. SSELA must be informed of any custody situation in advance and will request that the proper, updated paperwork always be in the child(ren)'s file. Parents will be required to comply with all state regulations and school rules as set forth in this Parent's Handbook.

Enrollment:
At SSELA, we strive to make the enrollment process smooth and transparent for all families. Here's what you can expect:
Step 1: Initial Contact
- Contact the school office by phone or email to express your interest in enrolling your child.
- During this initial contact, you will receive intake forms and can schedule a tour of the facility.

Step 2: Formal Tour and Enrollment Application
- Attend your scheduled tour and meet with the Director.
- The Director will provide you with the enrollment application, physical exam forms, and immunization record requests.
- You will receive detailed information about our program, policies, current applicable tuition rates, and any additional forms required for enrollment. **Please Note** that Tuition Rates are liable to increase, with prior notice. SSELA will provide as much notice as possible with respect to changing tuition rates.

Step 3: Submit Required Documentation
- Complete and return all enrollment forms, including health and immunization records.
- Your child's information will be entered into our ProCare system and securely filed.

Step 4: Payment of Fees and Tuition
- To officially secure your child's spot, all required registration fees and initial tuition payments must be submitted.
- Once payment is received, your child's enrollment is confirmed, and their space is reserved.

Note: Monthly accounts are billed (prorated if starting mid-month) and all fees must be paid before care begins.
Weekly accounts require payment of two weeks in advance plus applicable fees before care starts.
If you have any questions about the enrollment process, please contact the school office for assistance.

PAPERWORK, FORMS and ANNUAL RENEWAL:
To ensure the safety of every child and to comply with legal requirements, it is essential that we maintain up-to-date information for all students enrolled at our school. As previously stated, all necessary forms must be completed for each child before their initial enrollment at SSELA. To keep our records accurate, we ask that registration forms for each student be reviewed and updated annually during the February registration period.
Along with the updated forms, the registration fee of $100.00 for the upcoming academic year is also required to secure the student's placement. The updated registration documentation and the registration fee must be submitted by February 28. Registration, and all fees applied throughout the year are NON-REFUNDABLE. Failure to meet this deadline may result in the forfeiture of the student's place at our school for the following year, at the director's discretion.
Please be aware that SSELA may incur fines or penalties for any incomplete student information. Should this occur, the responsible parent or guardian will be held accountable for the payment of such fines, in addition to a $50 administrative fee.

DROP-OFF:
Parents are required to drop off their child(ren) in the designated car line. Should you prefer to walk your child into the building, please park your vehicle and escort your child to the front door, where a staff member will accompany them to their classroom. For the safety of SSELA students and staff, prior approval from the School's Director is necessary for access to any classroom. Upon arrival, children must be checked in through the ProCare App when released to a staff member.
Each child will be observed upon entry for signs of illness, communicable disease, or any unusual condition or behavior that could affect the child or group. If any issues are detected during the daily drop-off, the child must immediately return to the parent or guardian.

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Students will not be admitted after 8:45 AM unless an appointment has been communicated via ProCare with advance notice (prior to 8:15 AM the same morning). This is an exception rather than a routine occurrence. For security reasons, the school is locked at 8:45 AM and morning routine commences promptly. To maintain a consistent schedule for our students, late arrivals are strongly discouraged and may result in late drop-off fees or dismissal for the day, at the discretion of the director or person in charge.
On any given school day, under no circumstances will a child be admitted after 11:00 AM. This policy ensures that lunch and nap schedules are maintained without disruption to the student, staff, or classmates. There are no exceptions to this 11:00 AM cut-off time. Please see your Director, or office staff for questions.

PICK-UP:
All children must be picked up and checked out by an adult or a person authorized by both the parent and the school. Individuals, including parents, who are permitted to pick up a child must be listed on the child's registration form and approved in Procare. In emergency situations, parents may contact the school to verbally authorize an alternate pick-up individual. Additionally, this authorization must be communicated through Procare. While this practice is discouraged, we recognize that unexpected circumstances can arise.
The school reserves the right to deny any individual access to SSELA property for drop-off or pick-up purposes. Any unfamiliar individuals will be required to present a photo ID. If your child will be collected by someone not typically responsible for pick-up (such as a grandparent or other family member), please notify the office in advance to ensure all parties responsible for your child's safety are adequately informed. This notification is in addition to being included on the Pick-up Permission form or having prior approval, as outlined above. Parents are responsible for informing the office and updating this form whenever necessary. The form must be reviewed and updated at least annually, but changes can be submitted at any time via written communication through ProCare and by contacting the front office.
Please note: In custody-related matters, the parent signing the student into the school assumes full responsibility to comply with their court agreement, which must be attached to the enrollment documents. SSELA does not assume liability for either party in custody disputes. The school's sole responsibility is to act in the best interest of the child and will only release students to individuals authorized in writing within the student's file or under emergency circumstances, as previously arranged in writing. SSELA reserves the right to delay release until an authorized individual arrives and may refuse drop-off or pick-up privileges to any parent or guardian who has caused disruption on site or with staff.

CARLINE POLICY:
Please lower the front window to assist with driver identification.
SSELA implements a daily carline procedure for student drop-off and pick-up. Please do not allow your child to exit the vehicle until your car is parallel to a designated traffic cone within the car line. This ensures that all students remain safe and supervised at all times. Should you leave your vehicle before reaching the appropriate area, you will be instructed to return to your vehicle until it is properly positioned. We kindly ask that you remain patient and follow staff directions to ensure an efficient and secure process for everyone.
Note: For families with multiple children, all siblings will be escorted together at pick-up unless alternative arrangements have been made by phone or through ProCare Message. Please be advised that SSELA is not responsible for lost or stolen items from vehicles, the parking lot, or the facility. To help keep our campus safe and organized, we encourage families to double-check that all personal belongings are secured and that vehicles are locked when unattended.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL CONSENT:
This section of the registration form requests consent to contact an ambulance, your child's doctor, or dentist in case emergency care is required. Please provide the names of your child's doctor, dentist, and preferred hospital for emergencies. Include phone numbers, addresses, and any other relevant emergency contact information as appropriate. It is recommended that all emergency contacts are listed on the registration form. If your child has allergies or takes medication, please note these details on the form.

Privacy and Data Security
At Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy (SSELA), we are committed to protecting the privacy and security of all student and family information. We understand the importance of safeguarding your personal data and maintain strict protocols to ensure its confidentiality.
Physical Records: All physical student and staff files are securely stored under lock and key in the front office at each of our locations, with access limited to authorized personnel only.
Digital Records: Parent and student data is securely managed and stored through ProCare's internal desktop suite, which is synchronized across all three SSELA locations. To further enhance security, all cloud logins for our systems are protected with two-factor authentication (2FA).
We continuously strive to implement best practices in data security to ensure your information remains private and protected.

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INFORMATION CHANGE
Parents are required to promptly inform the school of any changes to home or work phone numbers and addresses. This information is essential to ensure we can contact you in the event of an emergency. Failure to provide updated contact information may result in additional fees. The school mandates that an individual listed as an approved pick-up for each child must be available within thirty (30) minutes' notice to collect a sick child or a child whom SSELA has determined should be sent home. Failure to pick up a sick student within 30 minutes may also incur additional fees. All updates regarding phone numbers, places of employment, residence, or approved pick-up information must be submitted to the office immediately. Please notify the Director in writing of any such changes at your earliest convenience.

IMMUNIZATION AND PHYSICAL FORM REQUIREMENTS: DH 3040/ DH 680
All enrolled children are required to have up-to-date immunization records or provide an exemption affidavit. Parents must submit the child's current immunization record, along with a form signed by a health care provider confirming that all age-appropriate immunizations have been received. For religious exemptions, parents should contact the Health Department for procedures regarding the required affidavit. Students with a religious exemption will not be permitted to attend if a communicable illness is present in the class. This also pertains to students requesting exemption from immunization for medical reasons.
If SSELA incurs penalties or fines due to missing immunization records as a result of parental neglect, those costs, plus a $50 administration fee, will be passed on to the client. All forms must be updated annually and submitted on or before the first day of attendance. A photocopy of the records will be maintained in each child's file. When a child receives additional immunizations, parents are required to bring an updated Form 680 for a new photocopy. Any changes to the information on this form should be reported and updated accordingly. Children with a religious exemption do not have the required immunizations and may not attend school during outbreaks of illness.

MEDICATION:
All medication for children must be in its original, up-to-date container with clear instructions from the prescriber or manufacturer. Prescription medicine must include the child's name; non-prescription medicine needs a permanent label with the child's name and the date it was brought to school. Before administering any medication, a completed "Medication Form" is required, and both the medicine and form must be handed directly to the Director or Person in Charge upon arrival. SSELA may refuse to administer medicine if dosage instructions are unclear or not followed, and can request a doctor's written consent for any non-prescription medication. After treatment, the Authorization form and any remaining medicine will be returned to the parent.

ALLERGIES:
It is important to have information about any food or other allergies that may affect your child. If your child has known food allergies, please complete the relevant section on the enrollment form so staff can be informed. Additionally, if your child requires an Epi-pen or emergency treatment, an "Authorization to Give Medication" form must be completed.

ILLNESS AND CONTINUED HEALTH:
These guidelines are established to promote the well-being of all children and staff. To maintain a safe and healthy environment, we ask parents to diligently monitor their children in accordance with these standards. Outdoor play is an integral part of each child's development; therefore, if a child is too unwell to participate in outdoor activities, we consider them unfit for group care. Any child exhibiting illness or presenting with a temperature of 100.7 degrees or higher should remain at home.
Upon arrival, each child will be directly observed by a staff member for early signs of illness, communicable disease, or unusual condition or behaviour, as outlined in the Drop-Off section above. If a child becomes too ill to stay at school, they will be supervised until alternative arrangements can be made. Children will be sent home if they have a temperature above 100.7 degrees, vomiting, diarrhea, an unexplained rash, lice, or suspected contagious illness. Children who become ill while in care will be supervised in a designated area separate from the other children until a parent/guardian or authorized individual arrives for pickup. Parents/guardians will be notified promptly when illness symptoms require the child to leave care.
Should you be contacted to collect your unwell child, pick-up is required within 30 minutes; overtime rates may be applied at the director's discretion. If a parent is unavailable, emergency contacts listed on the Pick-Up Permission form will be notified. The school reserves the right to require the child to visit a physician or provide a doctor's note before returning. Any child sent home must remain out of school for the rest of that day and the following day, and may only return once symptom-free for 24 hours.
Please refer to the following page for further guidance on when your child may return after being sent home due to illness:

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Symptom	May Return	Medical Note
Temperature **Axillary 100.7** **Oral 101.7**	24 hours no fever with no medication	No
Vomiting **Not spit up**	24 hours after last occurrence	No
Diarrhea **3 times within 8 hours** **Incl. antibiotic reaction**	24 hours after last occurrence	No
Skin Irritations/Rashes	Medical note identifying whether or not it is contagious	Yes
Ring Worm	24 hours after treatment Must be covered	Yes
Chicken Pox	6 days after onset Pox/Sores must be dried and crusted	No
Hand, Foot, & Mouth	24 hours no fever with no medication Pox/Sores must be dried and crusted	Yes
Impetigo	24 hours after treatment	Yes
Measles	6 days after rash appears	Yes
Scabies	24 hours after treatment	Yes
Lice	Lice and nit FREE Proof of treatment Will be inspected upon return to school	No
Mumps	9 days after onset or once swelling subsides	Yes
Strep Throat/Sore Throat	24 hours after treatment 24 hours no fever with no medication	Yes
Nasal Drainage **Yellow/Green present** **after 10 days**	24 hours after treatment 24 hours no fever with no medication	No
Uncontrollable Cough	No fever without medication Child can still participate in activities	Yes
Pink Eye	24 hours after treatment	Yes
Fifth Disease	24 hours after treatment 24 hours no fever with no medication	Yes

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ACCIDENT REPORTS:
At SSELA, safety remains our highest priority. However, there may be occasions when an accident or incident occurs involving your child and another student. If the situation requires more than basic care, our staff will complete a detailed incident report outlining the circumstances and the nature of any injuries sustained. Should first aid be administered, the procedures and treatments provided will be fully documented.
You will receive a copy of the accident report, signed by the responsible teacher at the time of the incident, via ProCare. We kindly request that you sign the provided copy in ProCare to acknowledge that you have been informed about your child's injury. This process is designed to facilitate clear communication and ensures that important details are not overlooked during busy departures.
In cases where your child is injured by another child, we ask for your understanding and cooperation in respecting the privacy of all students involved. Our policy prohibits disclosing the identity of other children, as doing so could create discomfort among families and staff. Please be assured that all behavioral matters are managed with professionalism and discretion.

CHILDREN REQUIRING SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:
SSELA complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and relevant regulations regarding services for individuals with disabilities. Special accommodations for children will be provided when possible, within the organization's authority. Accommodations may include specific treatments prescribed by a professional or parent, equipment modifications, or removal of physical barriers. All accommodations are documented in the child's file. When admitting a child with special needs, staff members are required to implement the reasonable accommodations designated for that child. Questions about accommodations should be directed to leadership staff. If accommodations do not ensure safety for all students, dismissal may be considered.

DISCIPLINE:
SSELA ensures a safe, positive learning environment through positive reinforcement and appropriate behavior modeling—never using harsh or physical punishment. The school's policy emphasizes self-control, respect, and self-esteem, with discipline focused on teaching social skills and problem-solving. Students needing extra support may be referred to the Director. Ongoing issues lead to a documented plan with school and home; if unresolved or safety is at risk, dismissal may occur.
At SSELA, we recognize that the partnership between school and families plays a vital role in fostering each student's academic and personal growth. Open communication with parents or guardians is encouraged at every stage of the disciplinary process to ensure that strategies are consistent and supportive both at school and at home. By working closely together, sharing insights, and collaborating on plans for improvement, we strive to create an environment where each child feels valued, understood, and empowered to succeed. The involvement and commitment of families are essential in helping students overcome challenges and reach their fullest potential.

BITING POLICY FOR STEPPING STONES EARLY LEARNING ACADEMY:
The safety of children at school is a primary concern. This biting policy outlines procedures staff will follow if a biting incident occurs. Toddlers may bite others for a variety of reasons, including teething, fatigue, frustration, experimentation, or seeking attention. Due to limited verbal skills and impulsivity, some toddlers may bite without an obvious cause. The school encourages children to express themselves verbally when angry or frustrated. Staff will provide close supervision at all times.
If a biting incident occurs, these steps will be followed:

- The act of biting will be interrupted with a clear statement, such as "No...we don't bite people. Biting is only for food."
- Staff will remain calm and avoid overreacting.
- The child who was bitten will be comforted.
- The child who bit will be removed from the situation and offered an alternative activity.
- The wound of the bitten child will be evaluated, cleaned with soap and water, and ice applied as needed.
- Parents of both children will be informed about the incident. Relevant forms, such as an Incident Report, will be completed. If medical treatment is required, a copy of the report will be sent to the Department of Human Services within seven calendar days.
- Confidentiality regarding all children involved will be maintained.
- Parents and staff should continue to observe the bitten area for signs of infection.
- All parents will be informed about the situation and the procedures in place to manage it.

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- Staff will monitor children who have shown a tendency to bite and attempt to prevent future incidents.
- Non-biting responses and appropriate behaviors will be taught and reinforced.
- Children will be taught how to respond to potential biting situations, using statements like “No” or “That hurts me.”
- Staff will work in partnership with the parents of children who bite and those who are frequently bitten to ensure ongoing communication and develop strategies for improvement.
- If determined necessary for the well-being of the individual child, the school, and other students, enrollment may be terminated during the biting phase. Written notice will be provided to parents before this decision.

Steps If Biting Continues: It is noted that biting can be developmentally typical behavior in young children.

1st time: Incident report for parents to sign.
2nd time: Incident report for parents to sign.
3rd time: Parents must pick up the child immediately and remove them for the day.
4th time: One-week suspension.
5th time: Conference to determine if termination is necessary.
If the bite breaks the skin, the child must leave school for the day.

TOILET TRANING

Toilet training is most effective when there is collaboration among teachers, parents, and children. Children develop toileting skills with consistent, positive reinforcement from adults both at home and in the educational setting.
Typically, toilet training begins around the age of two. When a child demonstrates readiness for toilet training, it is important for parents and teachers to communicate and establish a coordinated approach to ensure a smooth and successful transition.
The timing and pace of toilet training will vary for each child. Staff will provide daily updates regarding your child’s progress. Both the director and teaching staff are available to address any questions or concerns related to your child’s toilet training experience at SSELA. We ask that families supply several complete changes of clothing to be kept at school throughout this process. If a child is not making sufficient progress with using the toilet, SSELA reserves the right to require the use of pull-ups. Bathroom opportunities will continue to be offered regularly.

TOYS:

SSELA provides a range of toys, games, and other resources for children to use during school hours. **Personal toys are not allowed at school or in backpacks,** as these items may be lost, broken, or lead to disagreements. Exceptions include show-and-tell or sleep-toys, which should be clearly labeled with the child’s name. SSELA does not assume responsibility for toys or clothing that are lost, stolen, or damaged.

Do not bring toy guns, war toys, or any other toys of destruction.

CLOTHING:

We request that children are dressed appropriately for play and comfort during seasonal changes. As our curriculum emphasizes play and exploration, children may become soiled during activities. Weather permitting, outdoor play is scheduled twice daily. Children will participate in outdoor activities if temperatures are above 32 degrees or below 100 degrees, considering wind chill and heat index. Please provide a complete set of extra clothing for your child in case of spills or accidents. While limited spare clothing may be available, correct sizing is not guaranteed; therefore, you may be asked to supply clothing from home as needed. If your child returns home wearing school-provided attire, please launder and return these items within one week. All personal clothing should be placed in a zip lock bag clearly labeled with your child's first and last name.
We advise against sending valuable hair accessories, such as expensive bows, as staff may not be able to monitor them. Only colorful hair ties are permitted. Clear rubber bands are prohibited due to safety concerns if they are removed and worn on fingers or wrists; colorful hair bands are preferred as they are easier to identify and supervise. These guidelines are designed to ensure the safety and well-being of all children in our care.

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DIAPERS:
Please provide diapers, wipes, and diaper ointment (as needed) for children who are not yet potty-trained. A completed non-prescription medical form is required. Ensure that all items are labeled with your child's full name. You may leave a package of diapers at the school; staff will inform you when additional supplies are needed. If your child's supply is depleted, diapers will be provided at a cost of $5 each. For any questions, please contact the office.

SUPPLIES:
All instructional supplies are provided at SSELA, with a $150 annual materials fee assessed each August. The annual Supply Fee, and all other fees assessed by SSELA for the year are NON-REFUNDABLE. Students who enroll mid-year will be charged a prorated fee corresponding to their start month. ***Labeling items such as lunchboxes, water bottles, and backpacks with the child's name is requested.***

CURRICULUM:
Children acquire knowledge through activities such as play, experimentation, exploration, and testing. The curriculum is selected in accordance with the developmental needs of children in each room and provides opportunities for individual growth through exploration. Research indicates that approximately 90% of brain development takes place between birth and five years of age. Lesson plans and class schedules are available on the parent board in each child's room, on ProCare, and are distributed at open house or upon request. The program incorporates current practices in Early Childhood and School Age Education, structuring the curriculum to address the needs of most children in the group. While the curriculum varies by age group, it is based on these principles:

- Children learn through dynamic investigation
- Children initiate their own learning
- Learning arises from open-ended experiences
- Adults act as facilitators of children's learning

PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM: Learning Beyond Paper
The preschool curriculum will cover the following areas:

<u>Movement and Coordination</u>
- Physical attention and relaxation
- Gross motor skills
- Eye-hand, and eye-foot coordination
- Group games
- Creative movement

<u>Autonomy and Social Skills</u>
- Sense of self and personal responsibility
- Working in group setting

<u>Work Habits</u>
- Memory Skills/
- Following directions
- Task persistence and completion

<u>Language</u>
- Oral language
- Nursery rhymes, poems, finger plays/songs
- Emerging literacy skills

<u>Mathematics</u>
- Patters and classifications
- Geometry
- Measurement
- Numbers and numbers sense
- Basic Addition and subtraction
- Money

<u>Orientation in time and space</u>
- Vocabulary
- Measure of time
- Passage of time (past, present, future)
- Actual and represented space
- Simple maps
- Basic geographical concepts

<u>Science</u>
- Human, animal, and plant characteristics
- Physical elements (water, air, and light)
- Tools

<u>Music</u>
- Attend to different sounds
- Imitate and produce sounds
- Listen and sing
- Listen and move

<u>Visual arts</u>
- Attend to visual detail
- Creating art
- Looking at and talking about art

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DAILY SCHEDULE: Students must be checked in by 8:4**5 unless previously pre-arranged.**
Although your child's schedule varies somewhat day to day, a typical flow of a day's activities is below.

Activity Time: Activities specific to the weekly theme are presented along with basic activities such as puzzles, table manipulatives, dramatic play, blocks, etc.

Group Time: Group times are child-schooled participative sessions. The planned group activities include reading, music, movement, finger plays, discussion, dramatization, games, and experience stories.

Outdoor time: The playground is an extension of the classroom. Children can participate in an activity of their own choosing. Inclement weather, special events, or celebrations will occasionally affect the scheduling of outdoor time.

Snacks and Mealtime: Staff sit with children while they are eating, encouraging and participating in quiet conversation.
Rest Time: Children are given the opportunity to nap or rest each day.
***Due to weather conditions that do not allow us to go outside, such as heat over 100 degrees, cold weather below 32 degrees, or rain, there will be provided indoor activities in the multipurpose area that involve movement etc.

Specific activities are tailored by age group and are communicated weekly in each classroom. In addition, we host a weekly chapel service led by the chapel lead and provide a variety of extracurricular activities throughout the week to engage children. Preschool operates between 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Childcare provided outside these hours is considered "Wrap Around" care; during this time, your child may be supervised by staff other than their Lead teacher.

Screen Time and Digital Media Policy
At Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy (SSELA), we are committed to minimizing screen time and maximizing engaging, hands-on learning experiences for all children. Our goal is to equip our educators with abundant resources to foster development without relying heavily on televisions or other digital media.
Our approach to screen time is guided by developmental appropriateness and includes the following guidelines:

- **Infants (18 months and younger):** Screen time is not utilized in the infant room, with the exception of video calls for direct interaction with family members. Televisions in this classroom are used only for music or white noise with a black screen, ensuring no visual content for infants to watch.
- **Inchworms (12-24 Months):** For toddlers, screen time is limited to a maximum of **30 minutes per day**. Televisions in the Inchworm classrooms are used solely for music and movement activities, serving as a supportive tool during transitions or clean-up times.
- **Dragonfly (2-Year-Olds), Caterpillar (3-Year-Olds), and Butterfly (4-Year-Olds):** Children in these age groups are also limited to a maximum of **30 minutes of screen time per day** via television or other digital screens. This allows families to manage the majority of their child's recommended screen time at home. Please note that interactive learning tools like Hatch tables or Osmo are considered educational resources and are not included in this daily screen time limit.

We believe in providing a rich, interactive environment that prioritizes direct engagement, creative play, and social interaction over passive screen viewing.

CLASS DIVISIONS AND CLASS SIZE:
The school maintains an environment intended to meet the needs of children across all age groups. Homeroom class divisions are determined by three criteria: each child's developmental requirements, state-mandated student-to-teacher ratios, and the school's enrollment management plan. For children not yet in school, classes are generally organized by age to align with their developmental stage and facilitate calculation of age-based student-to-teacher ratios. Typically, efforts are made to place children with peers who will attend Kindergarten together.

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STUDENT TO TEACHER RATIOS:
Student to teacher ratios is based upon guidelines set by STATE law. The following chart shows the maximum ratios that we observe.

Age of children	Number of Students	Per teacher	Group Max
Infants	4	1	12
Inchworms (12-24 Mo)	6	1	12
Dragonfly (2 YO)	11	1	14
Caterpillar (3 YO)	15	1	24
Butterfly/VPK (4 YO)	20	1	20

*****Ratio during VPK Hrs. (8:15-2:15) 1/11*****
In addition to the teacher to child ratios each group also has a group maximum.

TRANSITION PLAN
SSELA develops an individualized Transition Plan for children preparing to move from one class to another. This approach is designed to help children acclimate to their new program, teachers, and peers. It also enables incoming teachers to understand the unique needs of each child prior to a group or multiple individual transitions. The plan is flexible, allowing us to best address each child's specific requirements. Since every child has distinct needs, Transition Plans may differ significantly between individuals. Your child's teacher or the director will share further information about the transition process when your child is scheduled to enter a new classroom.

OUR STAFF:
At SSELA, we are committed to providing nurturing, quality care in a highly interactive learning environment. Our friendly and qualified staff are an integral part of providing this environment.
All SSELA team members undergo a detailed interview and screening process. They are approved for work by the State of Florida via Level II background screening and fingerprinting, ensuring a clear background. Additionally, all staff members are certified in CPR and First Aid.
We actively seek candidates who are college-educated and passionate about early childhood education. In alignment with our **vision** to instill a lifetime love of learning, we encourage and support all staff in their pursuit of higher education and professional development. We offer incentives and programs to help our team members continue their education and stay current with best practices in the field.
Per Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) requirements, all SSELA staff complete 40 hours of in-service training upon hire and during their first year of employment. To maintain compliance, they then complete 10 additional in-service training hours annually. Furthermore, as an accredited NECPA facility, we require our staff to complete an additional 14 hours of in-service training each year, totaling **24 clock hours of in-service training annually** for each team member.
We make every effort possible to ensure our team members are the most qualified and equipped to love and educate your children!

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION:
Our program values strong partnerships between parents and staff. Consistent communication ensures a positive early learning experience for your child.

- Monthly newsletters will provide updates on the program.
- Daily updates are shared through Procare; text and email are not preferred to maintain clear records.
- Parent/Teacher meetings can be arranged upon request by either party.
- Parents may also request additional meetings to support their child's development.

For best practice, all communication—regardless of whether it begins with a phone call or in-person conversation—should be documented in Procare. Following up in writing in Procare promotes transparency and accountability, ensuring all matters are clearly communicated and appropriately addressed.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION:
We aim to maintain communication during drop-off and pick-up times. However, these times are not ideal for lengthy discussions, as staff members and teachers have responsibilities for all children in the group. The individual caring for your child at pick-up may not be the same person who spent most of the day with them due to varying schedules; many children spend up to 10 hours at school, while employees typically work 6-8 hours per day. Since children tend to learn most effectively in the morning, lead teachers responsible for classroom development are generally scheduled during earlier hours. For detailed information about your child's progress, please contact their lead or primary teacher. You are welcome

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to call to inquire about your child's day or request a more in-depth conversation with their teacher, with naptime being the preferred time to reach them. There is always a management team member available for in-person or phone communication, but ProCare is the recommended method for keeping a record of all correspondence. To best support our families and maintain adequate supervision throughout the center, our office is always happy to arrange one-on-one meetings with administration or your child's teacher, but we ask that you provide advance notice so we can ensure appropriate coverage during your meeting time.

CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAYS



Birthdays may be celebrated at SSELA with prior arrangements made through the child's teacher. Students are permitted to bring a favourite book, and parents or guardians can coordinate related activities with the teacher if desired. For example, with "Going on a Bear Hunt," families could provide enough bear toys for each student, and the class would participate in a school-wide hunt. Food is not permitted for birthday celebrations due to allergy concerns. Party invitations can be distributed at school only if every student in the class receives one.

If you need inspiration or have questions regarding how to make your child's birthday special, please feel free to enquire with the front office. The staff are happy to offer guidance and share creative ideas to help you plan a memorable and inclusive celebration.

CLASSIFICATIONS:

To ensure safety and comply with licensing, everyone on our property must fit into one of these categories:

- Scheduled employees during work hours
- Children in our care (with completed paperwork)
- Parents or others during drop-off/pick-up (about 15 minutes)
- Delivery personnel from approved companies, supervised by staff and arriving as expected
- Visitors, approved by the office, always accompanied by an employee, limited to once a month for up to 2 hours
- Volunteers, assisting with activities or exceeding visitor limits
- Vendors/Contractors with advance notice, always escorted by authorized staff
- Intruders, who will be reported to authorities

Anyone on site for an extended period must be classified as a visitor, volunteer, or intruder, including parents or off-duty employees.

VOLUNTEERS:

All parents interested in chaperoning an event are required to complete our screening process. Volunteers are also encouraged to contribute within our school community. For those visiting or volunteering for more than one day per semester, participation in the screening process is mandatory.

Please note that additional charges or vetting procedures may apply for those wishing to volunteer in the center. If you are interested, please see the front office for more information.

INTRUDERS:

The safety and well-being of children remain our top priority. While we maintain an open-door policy and encourage parents to visit their children, we also have a responsibility to protect all participants in our program. Therefore, individuals who have not completed our required screening and training process, as mandated by state law and internal policies, cannot spend extended periods within our facility. All visitors and volunteers must adhere to established safety protocols; those who do not comply with these requirements will be classified as intruders, and appropriate measures will be implemented according to our Safety and Evacuation procedures.

Video Surveillance and Privacy Policy

For the safety and security of all children, families, and staff, SSELA maintains 24-hour closed-circuit video surveillance at all locations. These cameras are in place to help ensure a safe environment and to support our commitment to high standards of care.

Remote access to our surveillance cameras is not permitted for parents or guardians. This policy is in place to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all students, families, and staff members. Video footage is considered confidential and is not available for on-demand viewing or distribution to parents or third parties.

In the event that a parent or guardian wishes to request a review of video footage related to a specific incident involving their child, a formal written request must be submitted via email to the school director. The request must include the date, time, and location(s) of the suspected incident to allow us to locate and prepare the relevant footage. Please note that video

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footage will only be reviewed in person with the parent or guardian present and will not be distributed, copied, or released except as required by law or in response to a valid court order.
SSELA's video retention policy is 21 days. Footage is automatically deleted after this period in accordance with company policy. Requests for video review must be made within this timeframe; footage older than 21 days will not be available.
If you have questions about our video surveillance or privacy policies, please contact the school office.

MEALS AND SNACKS:
Due to the nature of each child's unique diet and individual nutritional needs, we choose not to serve food at our facility. Instead, we ask parents to send their children with both morning and afternoon snacks, as well as a balanced lunch, all packed in reusable containers or bags that are clearly labeled with the child's full name. This approach allows each family to ensure dietary preferences, allergies, and restrictions are respected, while also supporting sustainability through the use of eco-friendly, reusable packaging.
The Department of Children and Family enforces regulations that prohibit serving certain foods to children under four years old because of the risk of choking. These forbidden items include, but are not limited to, whole hot dogs, popcorn, chips, pretzel nuggets, whole grapes, nuts, cheese cubes or sticks, and any similar food items. We kindly request parents to avoid packing these foods in their children's lunches. If you have specific questions about acceptable food items, please consult with us before including them.
Children are encouraged to develop independence and responsibility by putting away their personal belongings upon arrival each day. However, given the busy environment and the many items children bring, occasional mix-ups or misplaced items may still happen. Should your child's belongings go missing, please inform us as soon as possible so we can assist in locating and returning the item promptly.
Additionally, please be aware that our facility is strictly peanut-free in order to protect children with severe allergies. Any nut butter, spread, or substitute resembling peanut butter must be clearly labeled with its actual contents (for example, almond, sunflower, or soy), or it will not be served to your child. This policy helps maintain a safe and inclusive environment for all students, and we appreciate your cooperation in adhering to these guidelines.
Forgotten Lunch/Snacks: If your child arrives at school without lunch, snacks, or water, we will ensure they do not go hungry. However, repeated occurrences may lead to additional charges or disciplinary action.

Sample Daily Meal & Snack Guide for Parents:
At Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy, we encourage healthy eating habits! Please use this guide to help you pack nutritious and delicious meals and snacks for your child each day, keeping in mind the Florida DCF guidelines and our **PEANUT-FREE** policy.
Remember to pack a **morning snack, a balanced lunch, and an afternoon snack** daily. All items should be clearly labeled with your child's name.
Inchworms (1-Year-Olds) & Dragonflies (2-Year-Olds)

- **Focus:** Soft, easily chewable, and finely chopped foods to prevent choking.
- **Morning Snack Ideas:**
  - Mashed banana or avocado
  - Small pieces of soft fruit (e.g., cooked pear, ripe melon)
  - Plain yogurt or cottage cheese
  - Whole grain O-shaped cereal
- **Lunch Ideas:**
  - Finely chopped soft cooked chicken or turkey with well-cooked pasta
  - Mashed sweet potato with small pieces of soft-cooked green beans
  - Small pieces of soft cheese (not cubes) with soft crackers
  - Scrambled eggs with finely diced cooked vegetables
- **Afternoon Snack Ideas:**
  - Applesauce (unsweetened)
  - Small pieces of soft bread or toast
  - Pureed fruit pouch
- **Drinks:** Water or milk in a spill-proof cup.

Caterpillars (3-Year-Olds) & Butterflies (4-Year-Olds)

- **Focus:** A variety of foods from all food groups, cut into appropriate bite-sized pieces.
- **Morning Snack Ideas:**
  - Fruit slices (e.g., apple slices, orange segments, berries)
  - Whole grain crackers with cream cheese or sunflower seed butter (labeled!)

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  - Yogurt tube or cup
  - Vegetable sticks (e.g., cucumber, bell pepper)
- **Lunch Ideas:**
  - Sandwich (e.g., turkey, cheese, or sunflower seed butter) cut into small shapes
  - Pasta salad with cut-up vegetables and chicken
  - Hard-boiled egg (quartered) with whole grain bread
  - Leftovers from dinner (e.g., small pieces of chicken, rice, cooked veggies)
- **Afternoon Snack Ideas:**
  - Cheese stick (cut into smaller pieces if needed)
  - Fruit cup (in natural juice, drained)
  - Pretzel sticks (not nuggets)
  - Small handful of dried fruit (e.g., raisins, cranberries)
- **Drinks:** Water or milk.

Important Reminders for All Ages:

- **NO PEANUTS OR PEANUT PRODUCTS.**
- Avoid choking hazards for children under 4: whole grapes, hot dogs, popcorn, chips, pretzel nuggets, nuts, large chunks of meat or cheese.
- Pack foods that do not require heating.
- Ensure all containers and lunchboxes are clearly labeled with your child's name.

PORTRAITS AND PICTURES:
School photographs are taken twice a year, during spring and fall. Fall sessions typically include two sittings per student and are scheduled for delivery before the holiday season. Spring portraits consist of one sitting and a full class photo. Proofs are provided prior to purchase decisions. Additionally, photographs may be taken of students during activities, for use on cubbies, in projects, or for promotional materials. Parents have the option to decline photography in the enrollment application and may update their preference with the front office at any time.

REGISTRATION, SUPPLY, INSURANCE FEES:
Annual registration, supply, and insurance fees are required throughout the year: $100 registration (due each February), $150 supply fee (each August), and $120 insurance fee (each October). These fees cover materials for the school year if the child remains enrolled. If a student leaves the program and returns, a re-registration and an additional materials fee apply, unless parents continue paying monthly fees to keep their spot. Students who stay enrolled for the summer months will also be charged a Summer Supply Fee of $100, applied at the beginning of May.
Fee Schedule: NOTE: Fees are NON-REFUNDABLE
February – Registration Fee: $100
August – Supply Fee: $150
May – Summer Supply Fee: $100 (for students remaining in care during summer)
October – Insurance Fee: $120
Note: Supply and insurance fees are prorated based on enrollment month, then charged in full the following August/October and annually after that.

MONTHLY TUITION FEES:
Our policy requires that clients pay for the reserved spot their child occupies at our school. Tuition is determined by a fixed monthly fee, which remains due regardless of the child's attendance patterns. This fee structure is outlined in the contract signed by parents during enrollment. Contracts may be amended as necessary, provided a two-week notice of intent to change services is given, subject to management's discretion and space availability. Contracts are renewed annually before June 1. As the monthly fees are consistent, invoices will not be issued as reminders. For summer break, parents will enter into a new contract specifying the applicable charges for that period.
For accounts billed weekly, please note that the same amount is charged each week regardless of attendance, and additional administrative charges may apply to accounts on a weekly billing schedule. As stated above, two weeks fees are required in order to begin care.

PAYMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:
Monthly payments are required by the 10th of each month. A late payment convenience fee of $50.00 will be applied if payment is not received by the close of business on the 10th. If tuition remains unpaid or the school is not contacted by the 15th, services may be terminated. Additionally, a maintenance and collection fee of $5 per day will be assessed for each

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day the account remains outstanding. Accounts must remain current unless alternative arrangements have been authorized by the Director.
A $50.00 fee will be charged for all returned checks. Upon receipt of two non-sufficient funds (NSF) checks, future payments must be made via cashier's check or money order. Notice of withdrawal requires at least two weeks' written notice; otherwise, an additional two weeks' fees will be charged.
Payments may be made by personal check, cashier's check, credit card via ProCare (subject to ProCare service fees), money order, or cash. All payments should be **made payable to: Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy LLC**.
Payments can be provided directly to the Director by personal check, cashier's check, credit card through ProCare (service fees apply), or in cash.
Please note, all tuition is non-refundable except for prepaid tuition that exceeds any outstanding charges, including the required two weeks' notice. The final week's tuition must be paid in advance and will be adjusted annually as rates change.
Registration fees are non-refundable. All fees assessed throughout the year are NON-REFUNDABLE.
SSELA reserves the right to pursue collection of outstanding fees, which may include a two-week termination fee as well as any costs associated with collection, including attorney's fees. SSELA also reserves the right to immediately terminate all services, including but not limited to immediate dismissal of children from the facility, at its discretion.

DISCOUNTS:
SSELA is pleased to offer the following discounts: 1) $25 military discount, 2) $25 sibling discount.

REFUNDS:
Refunds are not issued. Overpayments are credited toward your next week's tuition. If a balance remains after your child's last day, required fees (including two weeks' notice) will be deducted before any final refund is processed. Refund checks are mailed monthly per our billing schedule. Although fees are NON-REFUNDABLE, Tuition fees are refunded less any outstanding balance when care is terminated w/ proper notice.

RECIEPTS AND STATEMENTS:
Receipts can be provided upon request. Annual statements for tax and accounting purposes are available upon request for all accounts that have a zero balance. For any questions, please email or call the front office for account or billing information.

LATE DROP OFF/ PICK-UP FEE:
A fee of $5.00 per minute will be assessed for any drop-off occurring after 8:45 a.m. without prior notice of late arrival, or for pick-ups occurring after the scheduled closing time of 5:15 p.m. Additionally, part-time students picked up after 2:30 p.m. will incur a late pick-up fee. This fee is non-negotiable and remains the responsibility of all clients.
Parents or designated individuals collecting children are required to notify the school in advance if they anticipate being more than five minutes late for drop-off or pick-up. In the event that a parent is informed their child is ill and must be collected, a "reasonable period of time" will be allotted; failure to do so within this timeframe will result in the application of the late pick-up fee stated above.
Should neither a parent nor an emergency contact be reachable within 30 minutes of initial contact attempts, the late pick-up fee will also apply. If a child has not been collected 15 minutes after closing, efforts will begin to reach individuals listed as emergency contacts. Children remaining at the school beyond 60 minutes past closing will be considered abandoned, and Child Protective Services will be notified accordingly.

VACATIONS, ABSENCES AND LEAVING SCHOOL:
Vacations and absences due to illness will be billed at the standard rate. We kindly request that all absences be reported to the SSELA office either prior to or on the day of the absence.
Withdrawal: A two-week written notice is required before withdrawing your child from school or making changes to your child's contract. If this notice is not provided, an additional two weeks of fees will be charged following your child's departure. Continued failure to notify the school will result in regular fees accruing until written notification is received, at which point a further two weeks of fees will be applied. The school retains the right to require the dis-enrollment of a child in accordance with our "Discipline Policy" and/or "Behavior Intervention Policy." Additionally, the school may require the dis-enrollment of any child whose parent or guardian exhibits uncooperative, aggressive, dissatisfied, or hostile behavior towards the school, its policies, or staff.
Note: In cases involving a Military Order or family emergency necessitating immediate disenrollment, fees typically assessed for lack of proper notice may be waived upon provision of appropriate documentation. The decision to waive such fees under emergency circumstances lies at the discretion of SSELA management.

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QUIET TIME:
Children under 4 years old are scheduled to have quiet time and rest as part of their daily routine. After lunch, all children rest on mats due to the active nature of their previous activities. Alternative ways of resting, such as soft music or stories, are provided for those who do not wish to sleep. Infants' nap times are based on their individual schedules.
The program is structured to provide a balance between large motor/active play and quiet time. Every child participates in a daily quiet period. Children aged 1 year through pre-K have a designated quiet time each day, with the duration determined by the flexible schedule posted in their classroom.

CHILD ABUSE REPORTING POLICY:
Florida law requires SSELA and all childcare staff to report any suspected child abuse to state authorities. As mandatory reporters, our staff must refer all concerns directly to Child Protective Services without conducting internal investigations. To prevent misunderstandings, please inform staff of any existing bruises or injuries your child may have.
Disclaimer: By reading this handbook, Parents agree that they understand the obligations of providers in Florida being mandated reporters BY LAW, and agree to hold SSELA harmless from civil liability in fulfilling their lawful obligation in reporting suspected child abuse and neglect.

INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS:
SSELA retains multiple liability and accidental insurance policies at all times to protect its staff and families. For more information regarding our insurance coverages, or for details about policies and liability, please see management for further information. The annual insurance fee ($120) is NON-REFUNDABLE.

Expulsion Policy:
While we strive to support every family, expulsion from Stepping Stones may be necessary in certain cases. We will always attempt to resolve issues before enforcing this policy. Reasons for suspension or expulsion include:

Immediate Causes
- Child poses a serious risk of injury to self or others.
- Parent threatens or intimidates staff.
- Parent verbally abuses staff in front of students.

Parental Reasons
- Repeated late or unpaid fees.
- Incomplete required forms (e.g., immunization, physical records).
- Consistent lateness at drop-off or pick-up, or delayed response to calls for sick children.
- Verbal abuse toward staff.
- Disruptive behavior within our community (hostile or unpleasant attitude regarding operations or policy)

Child's Reasons
- Inability to adjust after a reasonable period.
- Uncontrollable tantrums or outbursts.
- Ongoing physical or verbal abuse of others.
- Excessive biting.
- Refusal to potty train when required by classroom.

Before expulsion, parents will be notified about concerns and an effort will be made to resolve issues together. If behavior does not improve after one or two weeks—depending on safety considerations—the child may be asked to leave.

Prohibited Substances

Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy is committed to maintaining a safe, healthy, and substance-free environment for children, families, staff, and visitors. The possession, use, distribution, or sale of illegal drugs or controlled substances, as well as the possession or consumption of alcohol, is prohibited on SSELA property and during SSELA-sponsored activities. Smoking, vaping, and the use of tobacco or nicotine products are also prohibited on SSELA property.

Parents, guardians, authorized pickup persons, visitors, and other individuals may not enter the program or assume responsibility for a child while visibly impaired by alcohol, illegal drugs, or another substance in a manner that creates a safety concern. If staff have reasonable concerns about a person's ability to safely assume care of a child, SSELA will take appropriate steps to protect the child's safety and follow applicable child-release and emergency procedures.

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Welcome to the Infants Room!

We are extremely excited to have your child in our infant classroom. Here are a few things to expect.

Please make sure everything you send with your child has their full name, first and last, on it. This especially means bottles with the child's full name and date, and lids with the child's full name. Please also label sippy cups, food containers, Ziploc bags, and pouch or purée containers.

No glass containers, teething necklaces, or pacifier clips are allowed in any classroom.

Crib sheets will be provided and washed by teachers. DCF policy states that we may only have the baby and a fitted sheet in the crib. Sleeveless sleep sacks are permitted, provided the child's arms are free and the child is not swaddled. Each child has an assigned cubby where you may place any items your child may need during the day. We suggest providing an extra pacifier and three complete outfits, including separate tops and bottoms.

Please bring your child's food ready to serve. We have plenty of storage, so you may bring a full sleeve of diapers and a package of wipes at a time. We will provide ample notice when supplies are running low and need to be replenished. Car seats must be left in the lobby. Diaper creams may be brought in, but a medication form must be completed and signed through the office. We are not permitted to administer medication other than diaper creams.

At six months of age, we begin the purée food journey. We ask that you provide foods your child has already tried at home. If you are introducing a new flavor, please provide an additional food option in case your child does not like the new flavor.
At ten months of age, we will begin asking for finger foods. This gives your child two months of practice before their first birthday.
We encourage you to provide a sippy cup along with bottles beginning at eight months of age so we can practice using it during solid-food meals. The sippy cup does not replace the bottle at this stage, but our goal is to transition away from bottles by age one. Bottles are not allowed in the Ones Room.

Thank you,
Stepping Stones Team

Snack/Meal Approved Sizes

Infant foods - cut 1/4 inch

Toddler - no larger than 1/2 inch

3 year old - bite sized or thin strips

4 and up - not needed

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Early Learning Academy

Infant Feeding Guide

AGE	WHAT	HOW MUCH	HOW OFTEN
0 – 1 months	Breast milk	Nurse every 2–3 hours	8–12 feedings/day
	Formula	2–3 ounces, every 3–4 hours	Continue to feed your baby on-demand regardless of breast milk or formula.
1 – 2 months	Breast milk	Nurse every 2–3 hours	8–12 feedings/day
	Formula	Approximately 4 ounces	6–8 feedings/day
2 – 4 months	Breast milk	Nurse every 3–4 hours	6–7 feedings/day
	Formula	4–6 ounces	5–6 feedings/day
4 – 6 months	Breast milk	Nurse every 3–4 hours	6–7 feedings/day
	Formula	4–8 ounces	5–7 feedings/day
6 – 9 months	Breast milk	Nurse every 4 hours	5–6 feedings/day
	Formula	6–8 ounces	
	Infant cereal	2–4 tablespoons	4–6 feedings/day
	Fruits or vegetables	2–3 tablespoons	
	Meats or beans	1–2 tablespoons	
9 – 12 months	Breast milk	Nurse every 4 hours	5–6 feedings/day
	Formula	6–8 ounces	
	Infant cereal	2–4 tablespoons	4–6 feedings/day
	Fruits or vegetables	3–4 tablespoons	
	Meats or beans	3–4 tablespoons	
	Dairy such as cheese or yogurt	1/2 – 4 ounces	

Critical Incident Response Policy
Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy (SSELA)
Purpose
Stepping Stones Early Learning Academy is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of children, staff, families, and visitors during critical incidents. A critical incident is a serious or unusual event that requires an immediate, coordinated response to protect children from harm and appropriately communicate with families, emergency responders, regulatory authorities, and other responsible parties.
During any critical incident, the immediate safety and supervision of children is the first priority. Staff will remain with and supervise children to the greatest extent possible, follow instructions from emergency responders and SSELA administration, account for children, and assist with reunification and family communication when appropriate.
Lost or Missing Child
If a child cannot immediately be located, staff will treat the situation as an emergency.
Staff will immediately:
1. Notify the Director or person in charge.
2. Maintain supervision of all other children.
3. Check the child's assigned classroom/group and the immediate areas where the child was last seen.
4. Verify attendance and child counts and obtain information regarding when and where the child was last observed.
5. Notify law enforcement or emergency services when the child is not immediately located or whenever circumstances warrant emergency intervention.
6. Notify the child's parent or guardian as soon as appropriate.
7. Cooperate fully with responding authorities.
8. Preserve relevant information and documentation.
9. Complete required incident documentation and notifications.

Staff may not delay an appropriate emergency response simply to conduct an extended internal search.
Following the incident, SSELA administration will review the circumstances and take appropriate corrective action involving supervision, security, staffing, procedures, training, or facility practices.

Suspected Child Abuse, Neglect, or Maltreatment
All SSELA employees must comply with applicable mandatory reporting requirements when they know or reasonably suspect that a child has been abused, neglected, or maltreated.
Staff must not conduct their own investigation or attempt to determine whether the allegation is true before making a required report. The responsibility of the employee is to report the concern to the appropriate authority as required and cooperate with authorized investigators.
When an allegation involves a staff member or other individual associated with SSELA, administration will take appropriate measures to protect children while complying with applicable reporting, licensing, employment, and investigative requirements.
Information concerning reports or investigations will be treated confidentially and disclosed only as appropriate or required.
This section works in conjunction with SSELA's more detailed mandatory child-abuse and neglect reporting policies already maintained by the program. The current Parent Handbook already informs families that Florida child-care staff are mandatory reporters.

Medical Emergency

If a child, employee, or visitor experiences a serious medical emergency, staff will:

1. Immediately assess the situation while maintaining child supervision.
2. Provide appropriate first aid or CPR within the responder's training.
3. Contact 911 or emergency medical services when emergency treatment is needed.
4. Notify the Director or person in charge.
5. Access available emergency and medical information when appropriate.
6. Contact the child's parent or guardian as soon as reasonably possible.
7. Send appropriate information with the child when emergency transport is required.
8. Document the emergency and the actions taken.

SSELA's Parent Handbook already contains medication, allergy, accident-reporting, and emergency-medical-consent provisions.

Dental Emergency

Dental injuries will be treated as urgent medical situations when the nature of the injury warrants immediate attention.

Staff will provide appropriate first aid within their training, notify administration, contact the child's parent or guardian, and seek emergency medical or dental assistance when necessary. Any significant injury will be documented according to SSELA incident-reporting procedures.

Mental Health or Behavioral Crisis

When a child's behavior or emotional condition presents an immediate risk of serious harm to the child or another person, staff will prioritize safety while using calm, developmentally appropriate responses.

Staff will:

1. Maintain appropriate supervision of the child and other children.
2. Remove immediate hazards when this can be done safely.
3. Notify the Director or person in charge.
4. Contact the parent or guardian.
5. Obtain emergency assistance when an immediate safety or medical threat exists.
6. Document the incident and any follow-up actions.

SSELA staff do not diagnose mental-health conditions. Families may be provided information about appropriate professional or community resources when additional evaluation or support appears warranted.

Death of a Child, Staff Member, or Other Individual

If a death occurs or is suspected on SSELA property, staff will immediately contact emergency services, notify the Director or person in charge, secure and protect the affected area as instructed by authorities, and maintain supervision of children.

Staff will not make an official determination concerning cause of death or interfere with the scene except when necessary to provide emergency aid.

SSELA administration will coordinate required notifications and cooperate with emergency responders, law enforcement, licensing authorities, and other agencies as applicable.

Communication with families will be handled carefully and respectfully while protecting confidential information.

When a death involving a child, staff member, family member, or other person significantly affects the school community, SSELA may provide families and staff with information about appropriate support resources.

Unauthorized Adult Attempting to Pick Up a Child

Children will only be released according to SSELA's authorized child-release procedures.

If an unauthorized individual attempts to remove a child:

1. Staff will not release the child.
2. The Director or person in charge will be notified immediately.
3. Staff will maintain supervision of the child.
4. The authorized parent or guardian will be contacted when appropriate.
5. Identification and authorization information will be verified according to SSELA procedures.
6. Law enforcement will be contacted if the individual becomes threatening, attempts to forcibly remove the child, refuses to leave when directed, or creates another immediate safety concern.

Staff will not physically place themselves or children into an unnecessarily dangerous confrontation.

Impaired Adult Attempting to Pick Up a Child

SSELA's primary concern during child release is the child's immediate safety.

When staff have reasonable safety concerns about an authorized individual who appears impaired by alcohol, drugs, medication, or another condition that may affect the individual's ability to safely assume responsibility for the child, staff will immediately involve the Director or person in charge.

Whenever possible, SSELA will attempt to identify another authorized person who can safely assume responsibility for the child.

If circumstances create an immediate threat to the child or others, SSELA may contact law enforcement or emergency services.

The situation will be documented according to applicable SSELA procedures.

Dangerous or Threatening Intruder

Any unauthorized or threatening person who enters or attempts to enter an SSELA facility and presents a potential danger to children, staff, or others will be treated as a critical safety incident.

Staff will follow SSELA's facility emergency procedures and instructions from law enforcement or emergency responders.

Depending upon the circumstances, appropriate actions may include:

- Immediately contacting 911.
- Alerting administration and staff.
- Moving children away from the threat when safe to do so.
- Securing classrooms or designated areas when appropriate.
- Maintaining supervision and accounting for children.
- Avoiding confrontation with the threatening individual when confrontation could increase danger.
- Following law-enforcement instructions.
- Beginning reunification procedures when authorities determine it is safe.

Detailed facility-specific emergency and intruder procedures are maintained separately so employees can receive appropriate training without publishing sensitive security details in a public-facing handbook.

Parent/Guardian Notification

Families will be notified of a critical incident involving their child as appropriate to the circumstances.

During an active emergency, immediate child safety and emergency response take priority. SSELA will communicate with families as soon as reasonably possible without interfering with emergency operations or instructions from responding authorities.

Program-wide emergency information may be communicated through SSELA's established family communication methods.

Child Accountability and Supervision

During a critical incident, staff will continue to account for and supervise children.

Attendance information, classroom rosters, emergency contact information, and other available records will be used as appropriate to verify child accountability and support safe reunification.

Children will remain under appropriate supervision until they are safely released in accordance with SSELA procedures or transferred to emergency personnel as circumstances require.

Emergency Responders and Authorities

SSELA will cooperate with law enforcement, fire/rescue personnel, emergency medical services, child-protection authorities, licensing officials, and other authorized agencies during and following a critical incident.

When instructions from responding authorities conflict with routine school operations, staff will follow lawful emergency instructions intended to protect life and safety.

Incident Documentation

Following a critical incident, appropriate SSELA personnel will document the event in accordance with applicable incident-reporting requirements.

Documentation should include factual information regarding the incident, actions taken, notifications made, injuries or known outcomes when appropriate, and relevant follow-up.

Staff should record observations and known facts rather than speculation.

Confidentiality

Information concerning children, families, staff members, investigations, injuries, or other individuals involved in a critical incident will be protected according to applicable confidentiality requirements.

SSELA will not unnecessarily disclose identifying information about another child or family when communicating with parents.

Your existing Parent Handbook already follows this approach for child accident reports by protecting the identity of other involved children.

Post-Incident Review

Following a significant critical incident, SSELA administration will review the program's response and determine whether changes are needed to policies, procedures, staff training, supervision practices, communications, facility security, emergency supplies, or other program operations.

Necessary corrective actions will be documented and implemented as appropriate.

Staff Training and Responsibility

Staff members are responsible for understanding their roles during emergency and critical incidents and for following SSELA's applicable safety, supervision, child-release, mandatory-reporting, and emergency procedures.

Detailed emergency-response procedures, staff assignments, evacuation information, shelter procedures, reunification procedures, and other operational emergency information may be maintained separately from this handbook policy.

Relationship to SSELA Emergency Plans

This Critical Incident Response Policy provides SSELA's overall policy for critical incidents and should be used together with the program's emergency preparedness, medical emergency, child-release, mandatory reporting, supervision, and incident-reporting procedures.

Glossary of Terms

Absences/Withdrawal
When a child is not present at school or is leaving the program, including the process and required notice for withdrawal.
Acknowledgment Form
A form signed by parents and the director to confirm understanding and agreement with the handbook's policies.
Admission
The process and requirements for enrolling a child at SSELA.
Allergies
Medical conditions where certain foods or substances can cause a reaction in a child; must be reported to the school.
Biting Policy
Guidelines and consequences for incidents involving a child biting another child.
Carline
The designated area and procedure for dropping off and picking up children by car.
Cell-Free Zones
Areas within the school where cell phone use is not allowed to protect privacy and safety.
Class Size/Ratios
The number of children assigned to each classroom and the required number of teachers per group.
Curriculum
The planned educational program and activities provided to children at SSELA.
Daily Schedule
The typical flow of activities and routines for children during the school day.
Discipline
The approach and methods used to guide children's behavior in a positive and respectful way.
Drop-Off/Pick-Up
Procedures for bringing children to school and collecting them at the end of the day.
Emergency Medical Consent
Permission given by parents for the school to seek emergency medical care for their child if needed.
Enrollment
The process of registering a child for attendance at SSELA.
Expulsion
Permanent removal of a child from the program due to policy violations or safety concerns.
Fees
Charges for registration, supplies, insurance, and other school-related costs.
Grievance Process
Steps for parents to raise and resolve concerns or complaints with the school.
Immunizations
Required vaccinations and health forms for children to attend school.
Incident/Accident Report
A written record of any injury or unusual event involving a child at school.
Late Fees
Charges applied when children are dropped off late, picked up late, or when payments are overdue.
Learning Beyond Paper
The name of the preschool curriculum used at SSELA.
Meals & Snacks
Food brought from home for children to eat during the school day; SSELA does not provide meals.
Medication Policy
Rules for bringing, storing, and administering medicine at school.
Parent Brochures
Required informational pamphlets provided to parents by the school.
Privacy & Data
How the school protects the confidentiality of student and family information.
Quiet Time
A scheduled period during the day for children to rest or nap.

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Ratios
The maximum number of children allowed per teacher, as required by law.
School Readiness
A state-funded program that helps eligible families pay for childcare.
Supplies
Items children need for school, such as diapers, wipes, or extra clothes.
Transition
The process of moving a child from one classroom or age group to another.
Tuition
The monthly or weekly payment required for a child's attendance at SSELA.
VPK (Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten)
A free, state-funded preschool program for four-year-olds.
Volunteers
Parents or community members who help with school activities after completing required screening.
Weather Days
Days when the school is closed due to severe weather, following the local school district's decisions.

Key Contacts

We encourage all parents to reach out with questions, concerns, or to simply introduce yourselves. We look forward to another great year with your family!

Owners
Tammie Bowyer & Marilyn Wallace
Available by appointment only.
General Manager
Nicklaus Bowyer
Email: nbowyer@steppingstonesearlylearning.com
Contact via email to schedule an appointment if needed.
IT & Staffing Manager
Stephen Spivey
Email: info@sselacademy.com
Contact via email to schedule an appointment if needed.

Center Directors
Niceville Location
Director: Miss Kaitlyn Hollingsworth
Phone: (850) 842-2640
Email: niceville@steppingstonesearlylearning.com
Call, email, or stop by to say hi so that Miss Kaitlyn and her staff are familiar with you and your family!
Bluewater Bay (BWB) Location
Director: Miss Lauren Biesel
Phone: (850) 842-2717
Email: bwb@steppingstonesearlylearning.com
Call, email, or stop by to say hi so that Miss Lauren and her staff are familiar with you and your family!
Destin Location
Director: Erin Rosell
Phone: (850) 353-2713
Email: destin@steppingstonesearlylearning.com
Call, email, or stop by to say hi so that Erin and her staff are familiar with you and your family!

We are so excited for yet another year! Please contact us if we can be of assistance! Thank you for

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Please return this form to the school:

ADDITIONS AND CHANGES:
SSELA reserves the right to edit or adapt the policies in this handbook as the needs arise. The school will make all changes and additions available at the time these changes are made. Clients and customers will be notified of these changes through the normal written communication system of the school at the time they are made effective.

A copy of this form can be given to you upon request.

By signing this handbook, both parties agree to have read and understand the policies and procedures contained in this handbook. Both parties agree to be bound by the policies and procedures established in this handbook and any future revisions, so long as services continue.

_____

Parent Print Name

_____

Parent Signature Date

_____

Director Print Name

_____

Director Signature Date

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