



# STEMsteps

Parent Handbook

2017-18

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## Philosophy and Curriculum

STEMsteps promotes an environment of inquiry-based learning and employs children's natural desire of questioning the world around them to engage students in a variety of real-world learning experiences and activities. STEMsteps mission is to help children develop a life-long love for learning and increase students' academic self-concept. The emphasis on intellectual learning, rather than rote learning, encourages students to make broader connections and develop critical thinking skills. To achieve this, STEMsteps integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math curriculums seamlessly with the Arts.

### Curriculum

STEMsteps believes strongly in the *eight indicators of a quality prek-3 curriculum* provided by the *National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)* and the *National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE)* :

- *Children are active and engaged*
- *Goals are clear and shared by all*
- *Curriculum is evidence-based*
- *Valued content is learned through investigation, play, and focused, intentional teaching*
- *Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences*
- *Curriculum is comprehensive*
- *Professional standards validate the curriculum's subject-matter content*
- *Research and other evidence indicates that the curriculum, if implemented as intended, will likely have beneficial effects*

(as cited in EDC, 2013, p. 2-3)

STEM STEPS offers a child-centered, STEM focused curriculum utilizing project-based learning activities. Reading and Language Arts are integrated seamlessly utilizing a variety of texts, student journals, along with phonics and phonemic awareness activities.

PA CORE- STEM STEPS utilizes PA CORE standards to develop curriculum maps and guide instructional planning. STEM STEPS teachers use a variety of ongoing assessment to adjust instruction to student's needs and learning interests.

## Staff Qualifications

STEMsteps follows the guidelines set forth by Pennsylvania Code and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) for staff qualifications. As a private academic school, STEMsteps teachers have appropriate teaching certifications and bachelor's degrees from qualifying institutions.

### **Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers**

STEMsteps preschool teachers are certified in teaching Private Nursery School, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education or hold Dual licensure in Special Education/Early Childhood. Preschool teachers obtained bachelor degrees, through accredited institutions of higher education, and hold valid teaching certificates. Kindergarten teachers are hold valid Pennsylvania certificates for teaching and Master's degrees in their field.

### **Teachers Assistants/Aides**

Teachers Assistants at STEMsteps are graduates of an approved 2-year college or university having specialized in child development, early childhood, or elementary education. Teachers' Aides are at least 18 years old and are under direct instruction of teachers at all times.

### **Staff Members**

STEMsteps staff members are at least 18 years old and hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or a Certified Childcare Professional (CCP) credential.

## Confidentiality

STEMsteps keeps individual records for all students enrolled. Records include, but are not limited to emergency contact information, authorized pick up persons, student medical records, attendance, and academic records. Child records are confidential and shall be stored in a locked cabinet. A facility person may not disclose information concerning a child or family, except in the course of inspections and investigations by agents of the Department. All permanent records will be destroyed through shredding, six months after completion of the program.

## Communication

STEMsteps believes that effective communication is key to building a strong community relationship and a successful school. STEMsteps communicates to parents and the greater community through stemstepspa.com, social media, and direct newsletters emailed home. In the goal of staying "green" we want you to know that we try not to send a lot of papers home. Please check your email and add our email to your contacts to stay informed. STEMsteps encourages feedback and communication from parents and the community as well. Please feel free to email, stop in, or turn a written note into the teachers or staff members. If you need to update your child's drop-off or pick-up person, please do so online, on paper forms, and via note or email to the directors.

## Admissions

STEMsteps is a private school and accepts all applications for enrollment. Students will be admitted on a first come first serve basis. However, full time enrollment and siblings enrolled are considered prior to part time enrollment and non-sibling enrolled students. After all spots are filled, students may be placed on a waiting list for admittance if openings arise.

### Nondiscriminatory Policy

Admissions, the provisions of services, and referrals of clients shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin (including limited English proficiency), age, or sex.

Program services shall be made accessible to eligible persons with disabilities through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limited to, equipment redesign, the provision of aides, and the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods.

Any individual/client/patient/student (and /or their guardian) who believes they have been discriminated against, may file a complaint of discrimination with:

### STEMsteps

3281 Wexford Rd.

Gibsonia, PA 15044

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of Human Services  
Bureau of Equal Opportunity  
Room 225, Health & Welfare Building  
P.O. Box 2675  
Harrisburg, PA 17110

PA Human Relation Commission  
Pittsburgh Regional Office  
301 Fifth Avenue  
Suite 390, Piatt Place  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of Human Services  
Bureau of Equal Opportunity  
Western Regional Office  
301 Fifth Avenue  
Suite 410, Piatt Place  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-1210

U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services  
Office for Civil Rights  
Suite 372, Public Ledge Building  
150 South Independence Mall West  
Philadelphia, PA 19106-9111

## **Tuition**

STEMsteps charges a monthly tuition rate based on the number of days per week your child is enrolled. You can choose to attend the 10-month or 12-month program. Parents/Guardians will be able to choose from two billing options, a monthly payment plan, due on the 1<sup>st</sup> each month or a bi-weekly payment plan due on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. For payments made after the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month, a late fee of \$50.00 will be assessed. Cash and check payments are accepted and can be placed in the tuition drop box at the facility automatic checking withdrawal is available through the Brightwheel application.

Students enrolled full-time (5 days a week) are eligible for a 5% discount on monthly tuition when paid prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. Invoices are generated and emailed five days prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. It is the parent's responsibility to pay prior to 1<sup>st</sup> of the month if wanting the discounted rate. The full monthly rate will be charged to payments received after the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month.

The monthly tuition rate accounts for holiday breaks and time off throughout the year. This rate is constant and does not change month to month. Therefore, the monthly tuition rate is charged regardless of the days STEMsteps is closed. Days cannot be made-up if missed due to illness or vacation (see Illness/Vacation Policy below for more information). If you wish to change the number of days per week your child is enrolled, please complete a "status change" form and submit two weeks prior to the effective date.

## **Required Forms for Enrollment**

STEMsteps will be utilizing online enrollment forms as well as hard copy forms required by the State. Please be as detailed as possible and be sure to provide proper immunization dates, medical and allergy information. Once the information is submitted, parents may come into the center to pay the registration fee or send it by mail with the paper forms listed below.

For the State of Pennsylvania and STEMsteps records, paper copies of the following must be kept on file and updated on time: Emergency Contact/Parental Consent, Health Assessment, and a Declaration of Status form, and Agreement form (for before/afterschool enrollment), all located on the website [www.stemstepspa.com](http://www.stemstepspa.com).

Kindergarten Registration Requirements: Proof of citizenship (birth certificate), Physical, and Dental assessment.

## **What to Bring**

Toddlers and Preschool students may bring a blanket and/or soft toy to keep in their cubby. A change of clothes and sunscreen is required to keep at school. Bins for clothing are labeled and located in the rear of the facility near the restrooms. If your child is not potty trained, you are responsible for providing diapers and wipes. Please check your child's bin weekly.

Kindergarten students should bring an appropriate sized bag to take home belongings daily. Donations of items such as tissues, glue sticks, pencils, and craft supplies are always welcome but are not necessary to send in with your child as these items are provided.

## Food at STEMsteps

STEMsteps follows a Farm to Childcare (F2C) / Farm to School (F2S) philosophy and provides food for all students. A daily breakfast is served to students receiving morning care. STEMsteps will serve lunch and snack to all students enrolled in pre-school and kindergarten. Afternoon care students will receive an additional snack. STEMsteps is collaborating with Harvest Valley Farm for our local, fresh foods and will be engaging students in outdoor gardens located at the facility. STEM STEPS will meet all guidelines and regulations set forth by Pennsylvania Code for food regulations in a childcare setting and private nursery school. Students should not bring outside food into school unless there is a special need, which would be determined by the parents and directors.

## Arrival and Dismissal

Regularly enrolled preschool and kindergarten students may be dropped off between 8:45 and 9:00am. Parents must enter the facility using their secure code and sign their child in using their code and the app at the front desk. Please take your child directly to his or her classroom at this time, as everyone is preparing to start the day. Parents may pick up their child from **2:55-3:10pm**. Please sign your child out using the app at the desk and pick up your child from their classroom directly. If a parent/guardian is not picking up their child, a pick-up form must be on file stating that the said person is allowed to take their child home. If you are late in picking your child up or early in dropping off, after the second incident, the appropriate charge for hourly drop-in day care will be added to your monthly tuition for each occurrence. This hourly charge will accrue for each hour you are late in picking up, at 5 minutes after the hour. Therefore, after 4:05pm you will accrue two hours of drop-in care charged to your account and after 5:05 PM, three hours will be charged. This will appear on the following months invoice.

## Before and After School Care

Students enrolled in before and after school care may be dropped off starting at 7:00am and picked up as late as 6:00pm. Keep in mind, we use the status forms you completed upon enrollment to schedule staff. Please approximate your drop of time as closely as possible so we can ensure proper staff coverage. If you need to drop off earlier than usual or stay later than expected, please message the staff immediately via Brightwheel messaging.

If you would like to drop-in for before or afterschool care, please give 24 hour advance notice, when possible, to ensure a spot for your child. STEMsteps cannot guarantee last minute drop-in care is available.

**A late fee of \$1.00 per minute is charged for pick up after 6:00pm and will be added on to your next tuition invoice.**

## **Illness and Vacations**

STEMsteps understands that kids get sick. However, if your child is running a fever, they must be fever free for 24 hours before sending them back to school. If your child is feeling ill at school, the teacher or director will call home and assess the situation with the parent/guardian. As tuition is based on enrollment, not attendance, there will be no refunds or make-up days offered for school missed due to illnesses. However, all families enrolled in the 10-month program will receive 1 week (5 school days) of vacation time to use during the year. Students enrolled in the 12-month program will receive two weeks (10 days) vacation time. You can use your days to cover illness or vacations and can be deducted from the following months tuition. Please submit a written request on Brightwheel or through a paper note to the directors if you would like to utilize sick or vacation day deductions. Your average daily rate will be deducted when utilizing vacation days. Please submit your vacation request two weeks in advance to the director(s) via note or Brightwheel.

## **Inclement Weather Policy**

Parents will not be refunded for missed days due to weather-related closures. Tuition is based on enrollment rather than attendance, therefore the tuition rate is constant. STEMsteps takes into consideration severity of the weather and surrounding school closures before closing for the day. If STEMsteps does close, an all-alert will be issued directly to the contact phone numbers and emails on your account as well as through Brightwheel messaging.