



STEMsteps

Parent Handbook

2018-19

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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 or suggestion into the drop box at the main entrance. 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 students with 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 1st each month or a bi-weekly payment plan due on the 1st and 15th of each month. For payments made after the 5th and 20th 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. Credit card transactions will incur a 3% fee that will be added to the monthly tuition.

Drop in days must be approved by a director 24 hours in advance of the drop in and are subject to availability. Drop in days will be billed on the day they occur and the bill will be due within five business days. If drop in time is not paid in full, a 20% late fee on the remaining balance will be assessed on the following months tuition along with the past due amount. Drop in care will not be allowed if your account has an unpaid balance or if the center is full.

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

All registration forms for the school year are due by March 1. This includes deciding if you will be participating in the 10-month or 12-month program. In addition, any changes in enrollment (days per week or months of the year) must be submitted by that date. If you enroll in the 12-month program and do not make any changes by March 1 and later drop from the program, you will be charged the \$150 early withdrawal fee and 50% of the enrolled monthly tuition for July and August. Similarly, if you enroll in the 10-month program, you will not be guaranteed a spot if you change to the 12-month program after March 1. STEMsteps plans staff according to enrollment forms, therefore it is imperative to submit any changes immediately. If you are changing your drop off or pick up times, please send a message via Brightwheel and complete a new change of status form.

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 online through Brightwheel and fax or email required paperwork.

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.

Kindergarten Registration Requirements: Proof of citizenship (birth certificate), Physical, and Dental assessment. Additional forms are required if attending before or afterschool care program.

What to Bring

Toddlers and preschool students may bring a small blanket, small pillow, and **one** soft toy to keep in their classroom. Staff members will message you when your child is running low on diapers and/or wipes. A change of clothing is required to keep at school for ALL students. Toddler bins for diapers and clothes and rest time, are located in the classroom. Younger toddlers (12-24 months) will supply the above, along with all food, bottles, snacks, and written schedule outlining your child's routine eating and nap times for staff.

Preschool, kindergarten prep, and kindergarten bins for clothing are located in the rear of the facility, near the restrooms. If your child is not fully toilet trained, you are responsible for providing diapers or pull-ups and wipes. Please check your child's bin weekly if you supply diapers/wipes and seasonally if your child has extra clothes here. It is important that the clothes here are seasonally appropriate and fit your child. If your child does not have a change of clothes and their clothes become soiled- you will be contacted to pick them up from school or bring a change immediately.

Kindergarten students will need to bring an appropriate sized backpack for transporting papers to and from school, specifically for bus riders. Communication centers will be available for you to pick up your child's work each day, as backpacks are only permitted for Kindergarten students.

Please send your child with appropriate jackets, gloves, hats, etc. for the weather as we do go outside daily when it is above 30 degrees. 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

Food at STEMsteps is provided for children starting at 24 months. Children younger than 24 months will bring their own *healthy* packed lunches, bottles, and snacks. We are a nut free facility. In addition, we serve soy milk rather than cows milk. Please inform the directors of any allergies or special dietary restrictions for your child.

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 menu is available monthly and provided via email in advance of the month. Our food philosophy is to provide fresh, local and organic when available, food at the facility. STEM STEPS meets 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

School day 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 or ask your child's teacher to check them in. Please take your child directly to his or her classroom at this time, as everyone is preparing to start the day. Please do not use this time to have lengthy conversations with your child's teacher. Your child's teacher is responsible for keeping his/her eyes on the children and preparing for the days activities. If you need to discuss something, please send a message on brightwheel to set up a time for a phone or face-to-face meeting with your child's teacher.

Please be considerate that we begin circle time in all classrooms around 9:20am. If you are late, your child is missing an important time of the day and interrupting other children from learning. If your child arrives after 9:20am, they are considered tardy for the day. After three tardies, a \$10 charge will be incurred per late drop off. 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 be due within five days from the service date.

Toddlers and Preschoolers who have a difficult time at drop off will be asked to set up a goodbye routine and stick to it. A goodbye routing consists of a ritual you and your child do together and then you will hand your child directly to the teacher without lingering. This is important to decrease negative behaviors at drop off time and make the transition easier for you and your child. Be sure to discuss with your child at home that you will always return for them and you will see them later. Practice leaving your child with other family members and caregivers using the same routine.

Students enrolled in before and afterschool programs may be dropped off and picked up at their times listed upon enrollment (see below).

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 off 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. Early drop off by appointment with a director will incur an additional \$10 charge per day.

If you would like to drop-in for before or afterschool care, please give a minimum of 24 hour advance notice, 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, Vacations, Switching Days

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. If your child has uncontrolled diarrhea, suspicious rash, or fever over 99.8 you will be contacted to pick your child up. 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 full-time and 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. Part-time and 10-month enrollments will receive an allotment vacation days depending on monthly enrollment. Please submit a written request via the vacation/illness request form located at the front desk 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).

STEMsteps plans enrollment to maximize space for all children. Therefore, there is not an availability to switch days week to week. If you need to change days, please complete a change of status request and we can let you know if there is availability. However, we cannot switch days to make up for days that are missed or that are unused. Any approved switch would have to be approved and followed for the rest of the school year.

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. Kindergarten student will follow their home-school district for busing delays. If STEMsteps does close, an all-alert will be issued directly through Brightwheel messaging and STEMsteps email.

Withdraw and Termination of Enrollment

If you decide to withdraw from the program, please complete a change of status form located on the website, google drive, or at the front desk. You will be asked to supply the effective date. Please provide a minimum of two weeks' notice to avoid any additional charges. Early withdraw is subject to a \$150 termination of contract fee.

If you withdraw from the 12-month program after March 1, you will be charged the termination fee and 50% of the monthly tuition to be billed for July and August.

STEMsteps reserves the right to terminate enrollment at any time if any of the following policies are violated:

1. If you hire, or offer a position to, a current employee of STEMsteps to perform childcare services for you in your home.
2. If you hire a former employee to perform work or childcare services, prior to six months of their termination date.
3. If your child has been placed on a behavior plan and you have not followed through with implementation.
4. Any excessive instances of bullying, threatening, self-harm, or harming others.