



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
SCHOOL

PARENT HANDBOOK

2025-2026

We join together as a community—school, church, and family—to nurture the unique potential within every child, guiding them with faith, wisdom, and love.

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Dear First Pres Families,

What a wonderful blessing it is to welcome you into our community here at First Presbyterian Church & School! Thank you for allowing us to be part of your family's journey together and for the opportunity to walk alongside your children in the most formative years of their lives. I would love to meet you and get to know you better, so feel free to stop by our church offices and say hello, and if I can be of any assistance throughout the school year, please don't hesitate to reach out. I look forward to leading your children in our weekly chapel services, and teaching them about God's love for all people. If you are looking for a church home, we enthusiastically invite you to worship with us on Sunday mornings at 11:00am. We offer a 20% tuition discount for school families who become members of the church. May this year be one filled with excitement, love, and fun for all of us!

Peace and Blessings,
Pastor Neal

A Story of Growth, Creativity, and Community

First Presbyterian Church of El Paso has long recognized the importance of nurturing children's potential through faith, creativity, and meaningful learning experiences. With a commitment to early childhood education, the church established First Presbyterian Preschool in 1981, embracing an approach that honored children's natural curiosity and encouraged learning through exploration, collaboration, and artistic expression.

Under the leadership of Founding Director Cece Neal, the preschool opened with 15 students and three teachers. It quickly gained recognition for its child-centered, hands-on approach, growing to 55 students within a year and 100 by 1986. In February 1991, the school achieved national accreditation, reinforcing its commitment to high-quality, inquiry-driven education.

Faith-Based Approach

Established and operated by a Presbyterian Church, First Presbyterian School actively teaches and promotes Christian values, primarily through its use of the "nine virtuous roots" in class discussions and school-wide decision making. In weekly chapel services, we primarily share stories and songs from the Judeo-Christian tradition, although we also recognize the spiritual diversity in our community by engaging reverently with stories and songs from other faith traditions. We encourage prayer in chapel as well as the classroom, and we encourage our students to explore their own faith and morality as part of a life-long spiritual journey. Many of our school ceremonies, performances and recognitions occur during First Presbyterian Church worship services on Sunday mornings.

Rooted in the Reggio Emilia Philosophy

From its earliest days, First Presbyterian Preschool was inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which sees children as capable, creative, and full of potential. This approach values self-expression, hands-on learning, and real-world exploration, with the arts playing a central role in how children construct knowledge.

The preschool's success confirmed what educators and families already believed: children thrive in an environment that values curiosity, imagination, and meaningful connections. It was this foundation that led to the school's natural expansion in the years to come.

Expanding the Vision: A School Rooted in Creativity and Exploration

By 2020, families whose children flourished in the preschool sought an elementary program that would extend the same Reggio Emilia-inspired approach—one that blended academic depth with artistic expression, hands-on discovery, and relationship-driven learning.

That same year, First Presbyterian Elementary was established, beginning as a half-day outdoor learning program where children engaged with nature, science, storytelling, and creative exploration. Built upon the same Reggio Emilia values as the preschool, the program quickly expanded.

Now in its sixth year, the school includes middle school, continuing to emphasize a project-based, arts-integrated curriculum where students develop their skills through research, artistic expression, and meaningful inquiry. From kindergarten through eighth grade, students learn in small classrooms of no more than 12 students per teacher, fostering close relationships and individualized learning experiences.

One Campus, One Community, One Mission

In 2024, the preschool, elementary, middle school, and church fully united as one campus, strengthening the vision of a faith-centered, arts-driven, and inquiry-based learning community.

At First Pres, education is more than memorization—it's about creating, exploring, and discovering. Learning happens in the brushstrokes of a painting, the rhythm of a song, the structure of a sculpture, and the ideas brought to life through hands-on projects.

The Reggio Emilia philosophy remains at the heart of everything we do, shaping not only how we teach but also how we build relationships, foster creativity, and cultivate a lifelong love of learning.

We believe that every child is an artist, a storyteller, a scientist, a leader—a capable and confident citizen of today, not just the future. With curiosity as their compass and creativity as their language, they are growing into thoughtful, expressive, and compassionate individuals.

Philosophy

At First Presbyterian School, we treasure and celebrate childhood, embracing the natural curiosity, creativity, and boundless potential within every child. We believe that learning is a journey of discovery—one that is nurtured through play, exploration, and meaningful connections with the world around us.

Rooted in the Reggio Emilia philosophy and inspired by the beauty of nature, language, culture, and the arts, our classrooms are vibrant spaces where children’s voices are heard, their ideas are honored, and their imaginations take flight. We nurture an environment where students are given the time and freedom to inquire, create, and engage in collaboration, fostering independence, resilience, and a lifelong love of learning.

Through project-based and play-based experiences, children deeply engage with their environment, weaving together academic and creative pursuits in ways that are both joyful and authentic. They sculpt stories from their discoveries, paint their understanding of the world, and express complex ideas through movement, music, and design. Whether climbing trees, composing melodies, or uncovering the stories of civilizations past, our students learn by doing, questioning, and reflecting—developing both the skills and the confidence to navigate an ever-changing world.

Together—families, teachers, and students—we cultivate a learning community where every child’s worth and dignity are celebrated. As a school sponsored by a Christian church, we share the stories of our faith while embracing the rich diversity of traditions in our community, fostering empathy, understanding, and deep respect for one another.

Our children will go forth as engaged citizens, compassionate leaders, and innovative thinkers—builders of inclusive and peaceful communities who recognize that learning is not just preparation for life, but life itself.

Guiding Principles

In the Reggio Emilia Approach, there is a coined expression: “*A child has a hundred languages.*” This philosophy unites and develops all forms of expression—innovation, nature, construction, fantasy, art, music, dance, building, writing, talking, signing, science, body, and soul. These multiple languages help children build knowledge and understand the world around them in meaningful ways.

We view children as collaborators, communicators, and protagonists in their own learning. They are active participants, expressing their thoughts, asking questions, and engaging deeply with the world. Teachers take on many roles as nurturers, partners, guides, researchers, observers and advocates, supporting each child’s curiosity while providing encouragement and structure. Learning is a social process, and collaboration is at the heart of our approach. Through group projects, shared inquiry, and meaningful interactions, students develop communication skills, empathy, and a sense of responsibility to their community.

The environment acts as the “third teacher,” intentionally designed to inspire exploration, independence, and creativity. Natural light, open-ended materials, and inviting spaces

encourage curiosity and hands-on learning. Families are essential partners in a child's education, and we value their role in fostering a strong connection between home and school.

Documentation plays a vital role in our classrooms, capturing the learning process through photographs, journals, student reflections, and portfolios. This makes growth visible, allowing children to see their progress and teachers to tailor learning experiences to each student's journey. By embracing these principles, we create a learning environment where children are encouraged to wonder, explore, and express themselves in ways that honor their unique perspectives and limitless potential.

The Nine Virtuous Roots

Nine Virtuous Roots: The roots of a tree connect it to the earth to hold it upright, and provide it with nourishment to grow. In the same way, our core values connect us to our communities, help us make good choices and provide nourishment for our spiritual and emotional growth. The nine virtues we emphasize at First Presbyterian School come from the Christian Bible, but have been embraced and practiced by people of good character in many traditions. These virtues extend beyond the classroom and take root in conversations, interactions, and decisions of our wider community- parents, teachers and students alike. In this way, we are all connected, all nourished, all growing, teaching and learning together. The nine virtuous roots are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Building Blocks

Our preschool program is built on a foundation of Christian principles, woven seamlessly into every aspect of our learning and play. We believe that nurturing a child's spiritual growth is just as important as fostering their academic and social development. This is reflected in our nine character builders, which serve as a common thread throughout our entire program. These aren't just words; they're the values we live by and teach every day. From "In the Beginning," the first principle to be introduced, to "We Are Happy," our last value, we help children understand and embody these principles through stories, songs, activities, and, most importantly, by modeling them ourselves. This integrated approach ensures that children not only learn these values but also experience them in action, building a strong moral compass that will guide them throughout their lives.

Governance

Today, First Presbyterian School continues to grow and thrive, operating as a subsidiary ministry of First Presbyterian Church. The school is led and guided by parents who are elected to serve on the school board, while the school board itself is under the oversight of the governing board of the church (the Session). The day-to-day operations of the preschool are managed by the Preschool Director and the Elementary/Middle School Director, with support from church and school administrative staff, all under the leadership of the Senior Pastor as Head of Staff.

Directors of the Organization

Charlene Lievanos, Preschool Director

Laura Price, Elementary & Middle School Director

Nate Lindsley, Director of Operations

Neal Locke, Church Pastor & Head of Staff

Kimberly Barela, Assistant School Director

Patty Herrera, Administrative Director

WHOLE SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Admissions

The School is open to all children 1 year old through 8th grade, regardless of race, nationality, or creed, who may benefit from our type of program. To maintain the nature of our program, however, we reserve the right to decline to admit any child or withdraw any child, at our sole discretion. All necessary admission paperwork, incident and accident reports, progress reports, or other program documents will be filed in the school office. These files are kept confidential and, unless otherwise requested, are available only to administrative and teaching staff or regulatory authorities.

Classroom Placement

Children are assigned to a class according to their individual needs, days/schedule attending, temperament, gender and age, teaching style, and feedback as provided by parents and teachers.

Open Arrival

Open arrival is a service provided for parents who need to drop off before school begins. Children will begin their Reggio-inspired day in our outdoor spaces. Children may arrive on a natural stagger from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. and our school day begins at 8:30 a.m.

Afternoon Enrichment

Afternoon Enrichment is an additional program offered to all families. The Afternoon Enrichment program extends beyond the regular school day with options for pick up at either 4:20 p.m. or 5:20 p.m. Snack is provided by the school at 3:00 p.m. and children engage in a variety of hands-on activities and outdoor play. A drop-in option is available when arranged ahead of time with the office. The drop-in rate is \$50 per day.

Extended Day

Extended Day is a program offered to all children who are enrolled in the preschool or the kinder program. The children stay from 12:30 p.m. until 3:00 p.m. All groups offer a nap/rest time during Extended Day.

Fresh Meals Program

If you're unable to pack your child's lunch or prefer to reduce the daily stress of lunch preparation, we offer Fresh Meals. Participating children will receive a nutritious, child-friendly meal served in a reusable container. Fresh Meals is an optional service, and subscription details will be provided before the school year begins, with monthly menus released in advance. If you wish to add Fresh Meals at any point during the school year, please contact the office, and they will be happy to sign your child up.

Pick-up

To ensure the smooth operation of our dismissal process and to respect the time of our staff, a late pick-up fee will be charged for children picked up after the designated dismissal time. A 10-minute grace period will be observed. After this grace period, a late fee of \$15.00 for every 15 minutes will be assessed.

Authorized Pick-Up

For the safety and security of your child, we require that all individuals picking up a child be authorized by the parent or guardian. If the staff does not recognize the individual picking up your child, we will contact the parent/guardian to confirm authorization. The individual will also be asked to provide photo identification.

Child's Well-Being

The safety and well-being of your child is our utmost priority. We reserve the right to refuse to release a child to an individual if, in our professional judgment, that person appears incapable of adequately supervising the child. This decision will be made based on observable behavior and will be communicated to the parent/guardian as soon as possible.

Parent Involvement

First Presbyterian School believes that strong parent-school relationships are key to student success. Parents are welcome on campus for special school-organized events or to share experiences directly related to classroom activities. However, for safety and organization, parents must sign in at the office upon arrival and enter through Gate 1. Parents should only be on campus if attending a scheduled event or if invited by a teacher to share something relevant to the class. Teachers are encouraged to involve parents in various activities throughout the year, and we will offer numerous opportunities for parents to participate in their child's learning experience. We appreciate your cooperation in helping maintain a safe and productive school environment.

Birthday Celebrations

Students are invited to bring one special treat – for the preschool, mini cupcakes or muffins or a small individual cup of ice cream is the perfect treat to share with their classmates during their birthday celebration. Parents are kindly asked to drop off the treat with the teacher during morning drop-off or at Gate 1, where it can be left at the office. Please note that parents are not permitted to attend the celebration to ensure that the classroom's schedule remains undisturbed.

Party Invitations

Party invitations may only be handed out during school hours if the entire class is invited. If a child is hosting a party and only inviting selected classmates, please ensure that invitations are distributed off campus to respect the privacy and feelings of all students.

Devices

We are committed to providing an environment that fosters curiosity, engagement, and active learning. To ensure that students are fully present and engaged in their education, personal electronic devices (such as cell phones, tablets, and smartwatches) are not allowed to be used on campus during school hours, unless directed by a teacher for educational purposes.

Students are expected to leave devices in their backpacks or lockers during school hours. If a device is seen or used during class time without permission, it will be confiscated and returned at the end of the day. Repeat offenses may result in further disciplinary action.

Please notify the teacher and office if a student has an AirTag. AirTags should not be attached to a student's body, as they may fall off and become lost and are choking hazards.

Starting in Pre-K, students will have short, supervised access to devices to support their reading and phonics development. As students progress through elementary school, their device time will gradually increase, always aligned with the class curriculum and supervised by staff. In middle school, each student will be assigned their own device for research and class assignments.

The administration will have access to review the history of all classroom devices. If a student is found to be misusing a device, they will lose access to it.

Teachers may also use devices during their lessons to show real-life examples, demonstrate safe ways to use technology, and enhance the learning experience. As long as the teacher has an appropriate purpose, such as using music, language apps, online books, or research tools, we encourage this safe use of technology to help connect classroom learning to real-world applications.

Elementary and middle school teachers may schedule movie days in their classrooms to further support lessons, with parents being notified of the movie choice in advance.

Parking Lot Safety

Parking lots are a source of danger to young children. Please assist us in following these safety rules:

- All School foot traffic will need to enter and exit through the assigned gate.
- Enter and leave the parking lot with extreme caution. Be on the lookout for wandering children.
- Always hold your child's hand when going to and from an automobile.
- Please avoid conversing with other adults in the parking lot, unless your child is seated safely in the car with doors closed.
- Please NEVER leave your child/children unattended in the car while picking up other children. If necessary, ask another parent to watch your sleeping child.

Health

Complete and return Immunization & Health Records, signed, and dated by a physician **before** the first day of school.

- If your child is sick, please contact the office by phone at (915) 532-6157 or by email at school@firstpres-ep.org by 8:30 am.
- Parents are requested to notify the School office if a child has a communicable disease such as the flu, chicken pox, streptococcal throat infection, meningitis, impetigo, head lice, conjunctivitis, hand, foot, mouth disease, etc.

- Your child may be sent home if any symptoms of illness appear during the day. In such cases, your child will be immediately isolated from the others, and you will be contacted. The School will not administer any medications unless we have a signed and completed Authorization for Dispensing Medication form from a Physician on file and all medications administered will be documented on the form.
- Please do not send prescription medication, over the counter medication, sunscreen or other items that may be hazardous to children (example: small toys, food that may cause allergic reactions in other children). If these items are found in a bag, they will be taken to the office and returned to the parent.

Keep Your Child Home If He/She:

- Has a fever of 100.4 or higher or has had one during the previous 24-hour period.
- Has vomited or had diarrhea within the last 24 hours.
- Has an active cold.
- Has a heavy nasal discharge.
- Has a constant cough.
- Is fussy, cranky, and generally out of sorts.
- Is tired. Rest at such times may prevent the development of serious illness.
- Has symptoms of a possible communicable disease. (These are usually sniffles, reddened eyes, sore throat, headache, and abdominal pain, plus a fever.) Please notify the school immediately if the child does have a communicable disease.
- Has a rash. Please consult a physician before returning to school.

Your Child May Come to School:

- If a cold is over, but a clear minor nasal drip remains.
- If there has been an exposure to a communicable disease, but an incubation period approved by CDC and the school has been completed.

Safety and Security Policy

The safety and security of our students and staff are our top priorities. To ensure a safe environment, all adults on campus must complete a background check and submit it to the school office before being allowed on campus unsupervised.

Parents and adults who have not completed the background check process will need to be supervised by a staff member and will have limited access to campus.

To further enhance security, all doors, gates, and outdoor areas are monitored by school cameras. These cameras are accessible in real-time to the Directors of the organization and allow for the review of past footage if needed.

Animals on Campus

For the safety of children and to prevent potential allergic reactions, pets of all kinds are not permitted on campus. If a teacher or staff member provides an opportunity for students to interact with animals, parents will be notified in advance and it must be approved by the Director of the school. These special opportunities may include events

such as a petting zoo during the fall festival or the presence of bunnies and chickens in the spring.

Photo & Media

Our school values the opportunity to document and share the learning experiences, creativity, and achievements of our students. As part of our commitment to community engagement, we may use photographs and videos in school communications, including newsletters, the school website, and social media.

To respect family privacy preferences, we offer the following options regarding the use of student images:

1. Full permission – Families who grant permission allow their child’s image to be used in all school-related communications, including newsletters, the school website, and social media.
2. Opt-out – Families who choose to opt out do not permit the school to share identifiable images of their child. In this case:
 - The school will not post or share individual or clearly identifiable images of the student.
 - The child may still appear in the background or with their back turned in group photos, as complete removal from all images may not be possible.
 - For students in kinder through eighth grade, opting out means they may need to refrain from participating in on-stage performances, as these events are recorded and photographed. Families may adjust their permissions for a specific quarter if their child wishes to participate in a performance.

Once images are shared online, the school cannot control how they are used or distributed by others. Parents or guardians may update their child’s media permissions at the start of each school year or submit changes in writing to the school office.

Playgrounds

Our playground is a space for exploration, creativity, and discovery. We believe that play is an essential part of learning, and we encourage children to engage in active, imaginative, and sometimes risky play in a way that fosters confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills. Our approach allows children to test their limits, develop physical coordination, and build social skills while interacting with nature.

To ensure a safe and enriching experience, we ask students, staff, and families to keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. **Supervision** – At all times, student-teacher ratios will still be met while teachers are outside monitoring play, offering guidance, and ensuring children engage in safe and respectful exploration. Staff will intervene only when necessary to help children assess risks, resolve conflicts, or navigate challenges.

2. **Respect for Nature** – Children are encouraged to dig in the dirt, observe insects, and engage with the natural world. They may build with sticks, create forts, and explore freely, always treating living things with care and respect.
3. **Risky Play** – We recognize the importance of play that challenges children’s physical and emotional growth. Activities such as climbing, balancing on logs, running, jumping, and rough-and-tumble play are permitted when done safely and respectfully. Teachers will observe and guide children to assess risks and make safe choices rather than eliminate challenges.
4. **Boundaries and Awareness** – Students must stay within designated play areas and be mindful of their surroundings, including other children and natural hazards such as rocks, tree roots, or uneven ground. Climbing structures, trees, and other natural elements must be used responsibly.
5. **Tool Use and Loose Parts** – When appropriate, students may use age-appropriate tools such as ropes, pulleys, and hand tools under teacher supervision. Loose parts, including branches, stones, and building materials, may be incorporated into play as long as they are used safely and shared respectfully.
6. **Conflict Resolution and Inclusion** – Play should be inclusive and respectful. Disagreements and conflicts are seen as opportunities for learning, and students are encouraged to use problem-solving strategies to resolve them with guidance from teachers when needed.
7. **Weather and Outdoor Play** – Outdoor play happens in all seasons and weather conditions, unless conditions are extreme. Families should ensure their children come dressed appropriately for rain, cold, or heat, as nature-based play continues year-round.

Through this approach, we support children in developing independence, resilience, and a deep appreciation for the natural world.

Evacuation/Emergency Preparedness Plan/Security

While we hope that we never have to react to an emergency on our campus, we do have a formal Emergency Preparedness Plan that will be followed if necessary. We regularly practice fire drills, severe weather drills and lock down drills, as per state mandate. Exterior fencing, controlled access points, security cameras and effective staff and teacher preparation and communication are all a part of our security plan for your child(ren). If necessary to evacuate our property, we have arranged to relocate to the YWCA located at 1600 Brown St. 79902, 533-7475.

Accidental Injury

In case of accidental injury, we will make an immediate attempt to contact a parent. If necessary, we will also call 9-1-1. A Director or Assistant Director will make all decisions about the care of the child until the arrival of a parent or emergency care personnel.

Clothing

Provide simple clothing that is free of complicated fastenings. Because of messy art activities and active outdoor play, provide clothing that is washable and sturdy. Jackets

and sweaters should be labeled with your child's name. Send children in closed-toe rubber-soled shoes. Preschool families: Please plan to keep a complete extra set of clothing in your child's cubby. Dressing for the weather is also important—jackets for chilly days and sun protection when it's warm.

Students are welcome to express their style, but clothing should be school-appropriate. Shirts and tops should have respectful graphics or logos. Please avoid clothing with inappropriate language, images, or references to drugs, alcohol, or violence.

Special Performance

The whole school participates in two performances each year: one at Christmas and one at the end of the school year. We celebrate religious, patriotic, and cultural holidays, with a strong emphasis on culture in our learning philosophy. We joyfully celebrate our Christian faith while embracing and honoring other heritages. Families will be notified in advance about events and performances they are invited to attend.

Cold or Inclement Weather Days or Closures

The School operates a balanced indoor/outdoor program rich in a multitude of environments offering a variety of ways for in-depth learning. To support learning in outdoor classrooms, parents are asked to watch weather reports and dress children appropriately for spending time outdoors. If temperatures are below 40 degrees on a given day, we will keep children indoors. We will also do so in the case of precipitation, high winds or extreme heat. The school will notify you by email or text if there is no school or if there is a change in the drop-off or pick-up schedule. Please prioritize your family's safety and avoid venturing out when road conditions are hazardous.

Play Day

Prior to the first day of school, families will have time to visit their classrooms, meet their teachers, play outside, connect with other school families, and then head home feeling at ease and full of excitement for the first day.

We are excited to create this opportunity for families and children to feel more connected as a community of learners at the start of the year! Please plan to arrive from 8 am - 12 pm. All families should enter through Gate 1 and we will be happy to guide you to your child's indoor learning space. From there enjoy the outdoors and play areas.

Communication

We believe in maintaining clear and consistent communication between home and school. To keep families informed, newsletters will be sent every two weeks, providing updates on classroom activities and details about upcoming events. These newsletters will help you stay connected with your child's learning experience and school activities.

Parent/teacher conferences will take place twice a year, offering a valuable opportunity for you to meet with your child's teacher one-on-one. These conferences allow you to discuss your child's progress and ask any questions you may have about their learning and development.

School-wide and classroom updates will be sent through ProCare. It is important to make sure your parent account is set up so you are receiving these updates. ProCare will be our primary method of communication for sharing important information about your child's school experience.

While some teachers may choose to share their personal phone numbers with parents, please understand that teachers are often focused on creating special experiences in the classroom and may not be able to respond during school hours. If you have an immediate question, we kindly ask that you contact the office.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in helping us maintain effective communication for the benefit of our school community.

Water

Parents are asked to send children with water bottles (labeled with the child's name) each day to help them stay hydrated and focused. Please refrain from sending any other drinks to school.

Guidance/Counseling

First Presbyterian School is a vital part of First Presbyterian Church. The Pastoral staff of the Church is available to our families for guidance or counseling. Their doors are always open.

Financial Policy

Annual Fees:

Annual fees are due at registration, these include a registration fee and a classroom enhancement fee. These fees are required to reserve your child's spot in the school. The registration fee is non-refundable. The Classroom fee is refundable with a 30-day written notice before June 30th.

*Annual fees are not subject to discounts or scholarships.

Tuition Payments:

Invoices are sent out on the first day of each month and are due on the 15th. If the invoice has not been paid by the 15th, a late payment fee of \$50 per child will be assessed. If invoices are paid late in consecutive months or twice in one semester the late payment fees will increase to \$100 per child. Children will not be able to attend school if a payment is delinquent by more than 30 days. If you are unable to pay the tuition by the date requested, please contact the office to discuss your situation.

*Student accounts must be paid in full, with a zero balance, by May 30th to reserve the student's spot for the next school year. Accounts that are not settled by May 30th will have their Classroom Fee refunded and forfeit their spot to the next student on the waiting list.

Discounts:

Church Member: If you are a member of First Presbyterian Church, you are eligible for a 20% discount on tuition of all school programs (Core, Extended, and Afternoon Enrichment).

Active Duty Military: Active members of the Armed Forces are eligible for a 10% discount on all school programs (Core, Extended, and Afternoon Enrichment). Please contact the School Office to verify military status and receive the discount.

Sibling: After the first enrolled child, families receive a 5% discount for any additional children attending First Presbyterian School. This discount applies to all school programs (Core, Extended, and Afternoon Enrichment).

Annual Payment: A discount of 3% is offered to those parents who wish to pay the full year's tuition in advance. The discount also applies to the Extended Day, Afternoon Enrichment and Fresh Meals programs. This must be paid by the first day of school in order to receive the discount.

Payment in Case of Withdrawal from Program:

If a child is to be withdrawn from the School or a portion of the program, a 30-day written notice is required.

If such notice is not given, one month's tuition beyond the withdrawal date will be billed. This policy also applies to our Core Day, Extended Day and Afternoon Enrichment programs. The only exception will be made for active duty military families who provide copies of their Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders.

N.S.F. Checks:

There is a \$35.00 charge for each check returned to the school for insufficient funds.

Scholarships:

The School Board desires that all students be able to attend the School, regardless of their ability to pay the tuition fees. To fulfill that desire, the School sets aside a portion of fundraising to provide assistance to families in need. Scholarships are offered on a percentage basis. Each application is carefully considered and a varying percentage of assistance is offered based upon the needs of each family.

If you are interested in applying for a scholarship please contact the School Office or Operations@firstpres-ep.org for a link to the electronic application. All scholarship applications must be submitted to the School office **by May 15th of each year.**

Financial Needs of The School:

The School is a non-profit school, which operates at the pleasure of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church. The Church and the School are united in our operations and share the space and utility requirements. Salaries, security, maintenance, classroom supplies, and equipment are provided by the School tuition and annual fees. The fees collected

each year do not cover the cost of growing and improving our school. We are in constant need of funds to maintain our indoor and outdoor spaces, expand our library, purchase new learning technology, obtain new outdoor equipment, and to initiate new programs needed to keep the School up-to-date. No gift is too small and all donations are tax deductible to the giver. Please visit the website for ways to donate. Thank you in advance for your continued support.

Ways to Donate May Include:

Art Show: Our annual Art Show fundraiser provides a great opportunity to support our School through sponsorships and purchase of auction items to help fund scholarships, special programs and projects.

Teacher Training Fund: Provides for quality education through workshops and seminars for our staff.

Special Wish List: Special needs and requirements of the educational curriculum that are not met by our budget include playground development, technology and various resources for the classroom learning centers.

Volunteering: The School is always in need of volunteers! You may choose to help in the classroom, office, playground, special functions or become a Board member. We are always in need of donations consisting of paper goods, snacks, and art supplies.

PRESCHOOL POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Our Learning Approach

A Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool doesn't have a rigid, cookie-cutter schedule. The day is more fluid and responsive to the children's interests and explorations. However, here's a general idea of what a typical day might look like:

A Typical School Day

Core Morning Program:

- **Arrival and Welcome:** Children arrive at 8:30 a.m. and are greeted by teachers. The core morning goes until 12:30 p.m. They might engage in free play, exploring the environment and materials. This is a time for social interaction and settling in.
- **Morning meeting:** Reggio inspired morning meetings are different than a traditional circle time. Here are some of the differences: A morning meeting has a flexible agenda based on the children's interests and current projects. The children actively share ideas and ask questions. The teacher is a facilitator, guiding the conversation.
- **Exploration and Investigation:** This is a core part of the Reggio approach. Children might delve into play based long-term projects that are sparked by their own curiosity or a teacher's provocation. They might work individually or in small groups, exploring concepts through various mediums like art, construction, dramatic play, and discussions.
- **Snack:** A healthy snack is offered, each class eats together, encouraging social interaction and independence. Fresh Meals service for 1 year olds through Kinder Pips. Snacks will be modified to accommodate any food allergies or restrictions communicated by parents.
- **Outdoor Play:** The children have opportunities to explore outdoors, connect with nature and engage in physical activity.
- **Continued Exploration:** Children continue their projects, deepening their understanding and expressing their ideas in different ways. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding their learning and documenting their progress.
- **Lunch:** A nutritious lunch is provided or brought from home, eaten in the classroom with friends and teachers.

Extended Day:

- **Rest or Quiet Time:** Depending on the children's ages and needs, there might be a rest time or a period of quiet activities.
- **Outdoor Play:** Children have opportunities to explore the outdoors, connect with nature, and engage in physical activities.
- **Reflection and Special Interest Activities:** Teachers and children might reflect on their morning learning experiences and choose to continue working on those projects or they may focus on special interest activities like cooking, language immersion, art, or construction.

Throughout the Day:

- **Play Based Project Work:** This is the heart of the Reggio approach. Children engage in in-depth investigations of topics that interest them, often lasting days, weeks, or even months presented in an intentionally playful manner.
- **Collaboration:** Children learn to collaborate, share ideas, and work together to solve problems.
- **Communication:** Children are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings through various mediums, including language, art, music, and movement.
- **Teacher as Facilitator:** Teachers act as guides and facilitators, supporting children's learning and helping them to make connections.
- **Environment as the "Third Teacher":** The environment is carefully designed to be stimulating and inviting, offering a variety of materials and opportunities for exploration.

Key Characteristics of a Reggio Day:

- **Child-centered:** The children's interests and ideas drive the curriculum.
- **Project-based:** Learning is organized around in-depth projects.
- **Collaborative:** Children learn through interaction and collaboration.
- **Documented:** Learning is made visible through documentation.
- **Flexible:** The schedule is flexible and responsive to the children's needs.

Cubby System

Our cubby system is for the children and classroom use only. These cubbies are at the children's level. We ask you to refrain from keeping any ointments, sunscreen, insect spray, medication, and other items that are harmful to children, in your child's bag or cubby. Also, please do not distribute anything into another child's cubby.

License

The preschool is licensed by The Texas Health and Human Services. This agency has the right to visit the school announced or unannounced and have access to the facilities, grounds, files and records. We are evaluated annually against the statewide minimum standards. The school implements the required standards across all ages uniformly.

ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Our Learning Approach

Education is not just about filling minds with knowledge, but about sparking curiosity, nurturing wonder, and inviting children into the conversation. A child's voice is not something to be spoken over—it is to be heard, valued, and encouraged. Learning is a dialogue, a journey of discovery where questions are just as important as answers.

Our approach is woven with the threads of culture, language, nature, our Christian faith and the arts, creating a tapestry of experiences that connect students to the world around them. Our students are not just absorbing knowledge—they are living it. Through hands-on projects and real-world applications, they develop the confidence to think critically, the creativity to solve problems, and the empathy to understand perspectives beyond their own.

A Typical School Day:

The elementary and middle school day is from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Being present during these hours is crucial to receive the full experience of our unique and engaging learning journey. Each morning begins with a read-aloud session, allowing students to ease into the day with a story while engaging in quiet activities like coloring or knitting. This helps instill a love for reading beyond academics.

The core curriculum follows an integrated approach, combining math, science, social studies, reading, and writing in a way that connects to real-world applications. Workshops provide collaborative learning experiences, while tools like Mammoth Math and Lexia support skill development. Older students use Chromebooks for research and assignments, while younger students work in pairs with a 2:1 device ratio.

Novel studies play a central role in our curriculum, with students reading books together and engaging in projects that deepen their understanding. For example, past projects have included rewriting novels into comic books, crafting historical fiction stories, and creating multimedia presentations.

Afternoon Exploration & Projects:

After lunch, students engage in exploration classes such as art, theater, band, and orchestra. They also work on individualized research projects, developing skills in writing, public speaking, and creative problem-solving.

Quarterly School-Wide Projects for Kinder Pips through Treehouse Middle School:

- Community service initiatives in the first quarter
- Entrepreneurship through a school marketplace in the second quarter
- A school musical production in the third quarter
- An annual art show and fundraiser in the fourth quarter

Middle School Innovations:

Our middle school program includes robotics, a maker space with sewing and woodworking, and an internship program for eighth graders.

Afternoon Enrichment:

Learning extends into our after-school programs, where students lead initiatives like a campus composting project. These experiences encourage leadership, teamwork, and environmental responsibility.

Assessments

Assessment at our school is designed to honor the individuality of each child, capturing their growth, understanding, and creativity in meaningful ways. Rooted in our Reggio Emilia-inspired and project-based learning philosophy, we believe that learning is a dynamic process—best measured through authentic experiences rather than standardized tests or traditional grading systems. Our approach to assessment is holistic, ongoing, and deeply reflective of each child’s journey as a thinker, problem solver, and collaborator.

Portfolio-Based Assessment:

Instead of relying on traditional tests or letter grades, we use portfolio assessments to document student growth and progress. Each student maintains a portfolio that showcases their learning through:

- Class projects that integrate multiple subject areas, demonstrating both knowledge and creativity
- Writing samples that evolve throughout the year, reflecting growth in literacy and communication skills
- Math explorations that highlight problem-solving and real-world applications
- Reflections and self-assessments, where students articulate their learning process and set personal goals
- Documentation of hands-on work in science, social studies, the arts, and nature-based learning
- Teacher observations, anecdotal notes, and one-on-one conferences to provide a full picture of each student’s strengths and areas for growth

Portfolios are reviewed collaboratively with students, teachers, and families throughout the year, offering a comprehensive and personal view of a child’s progress rather than a singular score.

Integrated Learning and Project-Based Assessments:

Assessment is embedded in daily experiences, with learning reflected in real-world applications. Students engage in interdisciplinary projects that require research, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration. Teachers assess student understanding by observing participation, reviewing project work, and engaging students in discussions about their process and discoveries.

Each project is designed to align with Common Core standards while allowing flexibility for student interests, inquiry, and hands-on learning. Rather than testing isolated skills, we assess how students apply their knowledge in meaningful contexts, ensuring lasting understanding.

Student Reflection and Growth:

Students play an active role in their assessment process. Through guided self-reflection, journaling, and presentations, they develop metacognition. Reflection helps students set goals, recognize their strengths, and take ownership of their education.

Progress Sharing and Family Involvement:

We believe that assessment should be a collaborative process that includes families. Throughout the year, we provide:

- **Family-Teacher Conferences:** Held twice a year, where teachers and families review student portfolios, discuss progress, and set learning goals.
- **Narrative Reports:** Instead of grades, teachers provide written reflections detailing each student's academic and social-emotional growth.
- **Student-Led Conferences:** Older students present their portfolios, showcasing their learning and growth in their own words.

By assessing in a way that values the whole child, we cultivate a community of learners who are engaged, confident, and prepared for lifelong learning.

Homework

Learning is most meaningful when it is connected to students' lives and interests. Because we believe in balancing structured learning with natural curiosity and family time, we do not assign homework. Instead, we encourage students to read, explore, play, and engage in creative activities outside of school.

Field Trips

Field trips are an essential part of our integrated learning approach, providing students with hands-on experiences that connect to their interests, classroom lessons, community needs, and ongoing projects. These trips offer opportunities for real-world exploration, fostering curiosity, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the world around them.

Our field trip experiences grow alongside our students. Younger children in Kindergarten through early elementary grades will have occasional trips that align with their classroom explorations and developmental readiness. As students progress, field trips become more frequent and immersive, reinforcing their learning in meaningful ways. By the time students reach the Treehouse level, they will participate in field trips at least quarterly, with each experience designed to deepen their connection to their studies, community, and the natural world.

Once students enter the Treehouse Sequoia classroom, field trips may also include overnight class trips. These extended experiences allow students to engage in meaningful learning beyond the classroom while fostering independence, teamwork, and real-world problem-solving skills. Families will be invited to support class trips as needed, based on the guidance of the class teacher.

A signed permission slip is required for all field trips. Parents and guardians must follow trip guidelines, including packing requirements, financial contributions, and the school's device policy. Any additional costs for field trips will be added to invoices via ProCare. Families will receive advance notice of upcoming trips, including details on location, transportation, and any special requirements. We encourage parent participation and support in making these experiences enriching for all students.

Attendance and Participation

Our learning philosophy emphasizes group projects, teamwork, and collaboration. Being present is essential to ensure each student fully experiences the classroom environment and engages in our hands-on learning approach.

School begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m., and attendance will be recorded daily. Regular attendance is crucial for students to stay on track with their projects and assignments. If a student's consistent late arrivals, early pickups, or absences lead to falling behind on classroom projects, it may impact their ability to participate in field trips or special class activities.

These activities are designed to integrate with what students are learning in the classroom, directly connecting to their group projects and lessons. Attending such events without completing the necessary work would not provide the fulfilling, integrated experience we aim to create. Therefore, active participation in class and attendance is key to ensuring students get the most out of their education and extracurricular opportunities.

Students are also required to participate in our four whole-school projects: Community, Marketplace, Musical, and Art Show. These projects are key components of our curriculum and help foster collaboration and creativity across grade levels. In addition, students will work on in-class projects that connect to real-life throughout the year that contribute to their individual portfolios, reflecting their growth and learning.

If a student is struggling to actively participate in group projects with their classmates, the teacher may ask them to create an independent project. This ensures that all students are engaging with the material and progressing in their learning, even if they are not fully participating in group work.

Lockers

Treehouse Middle School assigns lockers to students in grades 5-8 for storing books, bags, lunches, instruments, and personal items. Lockers are assigned by classroom teachers and may not be shared or traded without teacher approval. Students may access their lockers before school, during designated break times, and after school but should not leave class to use them without permission. Lockers must be kept clean and organized, and food should not be left overnight. Temporary decorations are allowed inside lockers, but stickers, tape, or anything that may cause damage is not permitted. Students should not store money, electronics, or valuable items in lockers, as the school is not responsible for lost or stolen items. Students may bring their own lock but must provide the

combination to their teacher and the office. Failure to follow these rules may result in loss of locker privileges. Any locker concerns should be reported to the teacher or front office.

Elementary & Middle School Restorative Behavior Plan

Purpose

The goal of this restorative behavior plan is to cultivate a positive and respectful learning environment where students are held accountable for their actions, learn the importance of good behavior, and are supported in making positive choices.

Core Values

Students are expected to uphold the following core values throughout their school day:

- **Respect:** Showing kindness and consideration to others.
- **Responsibility:** Taking ownership of actions, words, and learning.
- **Kindness:** Being empathetic, supportive, and helpful.
- **Accountability:** Accepting the consequences of one's behavior.
- **Safety:** Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of self and others.

Behavioral Expectations

All students are expected to follow the behavior expectations in the following areas:

- **Classroom Behavior:** Listen attentively, follow instructions, participate in class activities, and complete assigned work.
- **Hallway Behavior:** Walk quietly and respect others' space.
- **Playground Behavior:** Play safely, use kind words, and share.
- **Lunch Behavior:** Use polite language, eat neatly, and clean up after yourself.

Behavior Levels and Consequences

Level 1: Minor Infractions These are low-impact behaviors that can be corrected without a formal disciplinary action.

Examples:

- Distracting others
- Mild arguing or disagreement with peers
- Small disruptions in the classroom

Accountability Steps for Level 1:

- **First Incident:** Verbal warning with reminder of expectations
- **Second Incident:** Sit with teacher during class activities
- **Third Incident:** Sit out of classroom with aide to work on independent work instead of class activity
- **Ongoing Behavior:** Parent contact to discuss patterns of misbehavior and written incident report to document behavior

Level 2: Moderate Infractions These are more serious actions that impact the classroom or other students' learning but can be managed with appropriate interventions.

Examples:

- Talking back or arguing with staff members
- Disrupting the learning environment (e.g., throwing objects, yelling)
- Physical aggression (e.g., pushing or shoving)
- Name calling

Accountability Steps for Level 2:

- **First Incident:** Loss of classroom privileges
- **Second Incident:** Taking space in another classroom or supervised area
- **Third Incident:** Written incident report and parent-teacher conference
- **Ongoing Behavior:** Removal from class for the remainder of the day

Level 3: Severe Infractions These behaviors are serious enough to require immediate action to maintain a safe and respectful school environment. They may result in more severe consequences, including being asked to go home for a set amount of time.

Examples:

- Fighting or physical violence
- Bullying (physical, verbal, or emotional)
- Vandalism of school property
- Stealing
- Extreme disrespect (e.g., verbal threats to students or staff)
- Use of inappropriate or offensive language

Accountability Steps for Level 3:

- **Immediate Action:** Removal from classroom or activity to a designated area with a written incident report
- **First Incident:** Director or Assistant Director meeting with parents
- **Second Incident:** Asked to stay home from school for a set period and possible referral to external counseling or support services
- **Ongoing Behavior:** Development of a formal behavior plan, involving the student, family, and Director or Assistant Director. If it is determined that a student needs an aide, and the family is unwilling to provide an aide or therapist on campus with the student, the administration will need to review whether First Presbyterian is the right fit for the students' needs.

Monitoring and Communication

- **Behavior Logs:** Teachers will document behaviors and actions taken in a behavior log for reference and tracking.

- **Weekly Check-Ins:** Teachers will communicate with parents weekly about student progress in meeting behavior expectations.
- **Parent Meetings:** Teachers and administrators will schedule meetings with parents if behavioral concerns persist, and develop strategies for improvement.

Interventions and Support

For students who struggle with ongoing behavior issues, the following interventions will be considered:

- **Behavior Support Plan:** A customized plan to address specific behavioral challenges, developed with input from the student, teacher, counselor, and family.
- **Mentoring:** Pairing the student with a mentor or older student for guidance and support.
- **Counseling Services:** Referrals to a counselor for one-on-one or group counseling sessions.
- **Restorative Practices:** In cases of conflict, students may engage in restorative practices such as conflict resolution meetings or peer mediation to repair harm done.

Appeals Process

If a parent or student disagrees with a disciplinary decision, the following steps can be taken:

- **Step 1:** Initial discussion with the teacher to understand the situation and the reasoning behind the decision.
- **Step 2:** A meeting with the Director or Assistant Director, if needed, to review the behavior and consider any mitigating factors.
- **Step 3:** The final decision can be appealed to the team of the Directors of the Organization if the parent feels that the process was not followed or the consequences were unfair.

Consistency and Fairness

To ensure that the behavior plan is applied fairly and consistently:

- All school staff will be trained in behavior management techniques and the implementation of the plan, which will be conducted during summer training.
- Clear communication of expectations will be reinforced at the beginning of the school year and periodically throughout the year.
- Regular monitoring of behavior will help identify students in need of additional support.

General Standards of Student Conduct
Written By Treehouse Sequoia Class of 2024-2025
(will be updated every three years)

In order to promote a positive educational experience for all students, First Presbyterian School expects students to adhere to seven basic standards of conduct: (1) exercise self-control, self-respect, and self-discipline, (2) demonstrate a positive attitude, (3) respect the rights and feelings of others, (4) respect school property and the property of others, (5) support one's own learning process and that of others, (6) adhere to rules, and (7) promote a safe environment that does not threaten school safety. Because of significant variations in student conduct, it is not always possible for the student code of conduct to address each and every act of student misbehavior. To that end, First Presbyterian School retains discretion to address student misconduct that is inconsistent with these seven standards even though the conduct may not be specifically included in the student code of conduct.

Discipline Management Techniques

- Assignment of school-related tasks, services, or duties
- Behavior modification contracts or improvement plans
- Calming-down time
- Conflict resolution to include Restorative Justice Circles
- Confiscation of items
- Counseling
- Seating changes
- Sending the student to the Director's office
- Parent conferences
- Parent outreach
- Peer mentoring
- Restitution or restoration
- Responsible decision making
- Removal from classroom and/or school campus
- Verbal correction

General Types of Prohibited Conduct

- Adding any substance, whether harmful or not, without permission to any food or beverages belonging to a student or employee, official, or a volunteer
- Bullying, which is defined as repetitive harassment and must include an imbalance of power between the people involved
- Cyberbullying, including conduct that interferes with a student's educational opportunities
- Engaging in conduct that can or does cause bodily injury
- PDA, public display of affection
- Engaging in harassment, engaging in oral or written threats of any kind of violence, and engaging in sexual harassment or sexual abuse

- Fighting of any sort
- Forcing an unwilling person to act or to not act by bribing them or with threats, force, extortion, coercion, or blackmail
- Hazing
- Hitting, pushing, or attempting to hurt another student
- Horseplay, roughhousing, and other playful behavior that though not intended to harm, presents a reasonable risk of harm to yourself and others
- Inappropriate verbal, physical, or sexual contact with a student of FPS or employee
- Invasive visual recordings
- Name-calling
- Creating a hit list
- Subjecting a student or FPS employee, official, or volunteer to physical harm, confinement or restraint
- Releasing or threatening to release intimate visual material of a minor
- Touching one's own private body parts inappropriately
- Ammunition, shells, bullets, or gunpowder
- Weapons, such as BB guns, air guns, or any other gun or knife to include props.
- Fireworks or any other pyrotechnic device
- Laser pointers (unauthorized use)
- Matches or a lighter
- Pepper spray or other small chemical dispensers
- Poisons, caustic acids, or other material that may be toxic to the human body
- Prescription drugs except as permitted by First Presbyterian policy
- Razor blades, box cutters, or chains
- Smoke or stink bombs
- Damaging, destroying, or vandalizing property owned by others or the First Presbyterian School
- Stealing from others including the First Presbyterian School
- Making false accusations or providing false statements
- Throwing objects that can cause bodily injury or property damage
- Uploading or creating viruses, worms, or other harmful material on any school device
- Recording any crime committed on school property and transferring it to any school device.
- Recording, sending, processing or posting any electronic videos, audio recordings or images that are abusive, obscene, sexually oriented, harassing, threatening, intimidating, illegal or that cause material or substantial distribution at school including cyber bullying.
- Using any device to record the voice of another or image of another in any way that disrupts the education environment or invades privacy of others without permission.
- Not complying with directions given by school.
- Preventing another student from attending a required school activity.
- Failing to immediately report to a school employee any object that is harmful
- Leaving class or school events without permission

- Skipping school without direct permission
- Unexcused tardiness or absence from school
- Violating computer use
- Gambling
- Clothing that is revealing or that displays inappropriate messages
- Littering
- Using profanity, vulgar language, or obscene gestures.

Important Information

If you would like to contact the local Licensing office or to obtain a copy of the minimum standards please log onto <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/>.

You may contact the Texas Abuse/Neglect hotline at 1-800-252-5400 or at www.txabusehotline.org.

Under the Texas Penal Code, any area within 1000 feet of a child-care center is a gang-free zone, where criminal offenses related to organized criminal activity are subject to harsher penalties.

All illegal substances including smoking, tobacco and firearms are prohibited.