

Early Childhood Special Education



Parent Handbook

Mesa Public Schools

63 E. Main Street
Mesa, Arizona 85201

Superintendent

Dr. Debra Duvall

Assistant Superintendent of Student Services

Dr. David Shuff

Special Education Department

William Santiago – Director of Special Education

Early Childhood Special Education Department

Dr. Allen L. Quie – Principal

Kristy Fife – Secretary

Diane Bartsch – Psychologist/Team Leader

Beth Dormady – Lead Speech Pathologist

Dr. Aura Villamil-Rubin – Psychologist

Cindy Wolf – Psychologist

Susan Davis – Psychologist

Marlene Morrow – ECSE Clerk

Theresa Przeslicke – ECSE Clerk

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Greetings and warm welcome to the Mesa Public Schools Early Childhood Special Education Program. As the largest Early Childhood Special Education Program in the state of Arizona, we are excited to partner with you in providing your child with the most positive early childhood experience possible.

We serve approximately 1,000 preschool children with special needs each year and have 44 certified teachers on staff. Typically, our younger children attend our morning programs, and children who are in their second year of preschool or who are approximately 3 years, 9 months old attend our afternoon programs.

When assigning your child to a school, we take into consideration the place where s/he is coming from, whether that is from home or from daycare. If you move outside of the Mesa Public School District boundaries, we will not be able to continue your child's enrollment with us, although all school districts are required to have similar programs. Also, we cannot provide transportation outside of the district boundaries.

Together, we can accomplish wonderful things for your child, and we look forward to our partnership with you as we strive to provide your child with an outstanding and positive school experience. Again, welcome to the Mesa Public School District where "we teach them well."

Sincerely,

*Allen L. Quie, Ph.D., NCSP
Principal
Early Childhood Special Education*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mission Statement.....4

Program Description.....5

Monitoring Assessments6

Eligibility for ECSE Services.....6

Classroom Model.....7

Continuum of Services7

Dismissal/Termination.....9

Registration/Enrollment.....9

Attendance9

Hours of Operation.....9

Transportation.....10

Backpacks.....10

Administrating Medicine10

Child Abuse10

Fire Drills.....10

Evacuation Plan11

Snacks.....11

Clothing.....11

Separation Anxiety.....11

Home Visits11

Mission Statement

For Mesa Public Schools

As one of America's outstanding school districts, our primary mission is to provide opportunities for students to learn as they prepare for life in an informational age. Students have access to comprehensive education programs in which they are taught to become productive and successful. Basic skills and the ability to acquire knowledge are emphasized. Students are encouraged to develop a respect for themselves and others and to become responsible citizens fully capable of exercising their rights to self-determination in a free society.

For Early Childhood Special Education Classrooms

- Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) believes that experiences in the early years of a child's life have a critical effect on development.
- Early Intervention may eliminate the need for or lessen the degree of remediation required later in a child's education.
- A continuing partnership between students, parents, caregivers, and educators in a crucial component of the education process.
- Communication, social skills and daily living skills are among the most important skills a young child can learn and are best taught in their natural contexts, such as play.

Program Description

The ECSE programs are designed to serve preschool children from 2 years, 9 months to 5 years of age. Our children with special needs may be challenged in one or more of the following domains: communication, social, adaptive, motor or cognitive skills. The students also work on increasing age-appropriate interactions within the home and school environments. Family members are involved in the educational process. Contacts and working relationships with community and agencies are facilitated as needed.

The ECSE programs integrate elements from both early childhood and special education. There is a strong emphasis on language acquisition and development. The following program goals have been established for all children who participate in our programs.

- To provide experiences throughout the school day to enhance communication skills.
- To provide opportunities for developing fine and gross motor skills.
- To encourage the development of a positive self-concept.
- To encourage an accepting and caring attitude towards others.
- To provide opportunities for development of a positive self-concept.
- To provide opportunities for development of appropriate interactive skills between peers.
- To provide guidance and support in the development of self-control and independence.
- To provide opportunities for creative expression.
- To provide a safe and positive preschool experience.
- To provide needed support and assistance to parents.
- To provide opportunities for making choices, develop problem-solving skills and growing intellectually.

During the preschool day, children participate in a rich variety of activities in which they experience many opportunities for learning. Each day children participate in circle time, small and large group activities, independent playtime, story time and movement activities.

A team approach is used while working with the children. A variety of trained staff are present throughout the day. One day a week a Speech/Language Pathologist is in the classroom working with the children independently and in groups. Occupational and Physical Therapists provide either direct or consult services based upon each child's Individual Education Program (IEP).

Ongoing Progress Monitoring Assessments

Mesa Public School uses the Creative Curriculum as part of their ongoing progress monitoring assessment for all children in all areas of development. Results are reported to the Arizona Department of Education as part of the Office of Special Education (OSEP) requirements to report early childhood outcomes. The information used is to help drive instruction that meets the individual needs of each child whether it's a child with special needs or a typically developing child.

Eligibility for Special Education Services Criteria

Children who are identified as having a disability or developmental delay receive early childhood special education services through Mesa Public Schools free of charge. It must be determined that these children are eligible for services through a formal evaluation process. They must meet eligibility criteria established by the Arizona Department of Education. Eligibility criteria and categories are as follows:

Preschool Moderate Delayed (PMD): means performance by a preschool child on a norm-referenced test that measures at least 1.5 to 3.0 standard deviations below the mean for children of the same chronological age in two or more of the following areas:

- (a) cognitive development
- (b) physical development
- (c) communication development
- (d) social/emotional development
- (e) adaptive development

Preschool Severely Delayed (PSD): means performance by a preschool child on a norm-referenced test more than 3.0 standard deviations below the mean for children of the same chronological age in one or more of the following areas:

- (a) cognitive development
- (b) physical development
- (c) communication development
- (d) social/emotional development
- (e) adaptive development

Speech-Language Impairment (PSL): means performance by a preschool child in a norm-referenced test that measures at least 1.0 and 1.5 standard deviations below the mean for children of the same chronological age or whose speech, out of context, is unintelligible to a listener who is unfamiliar with the child.

Visual Impairment (VI): there must be documentation by an appropriate specialist that the visual impairment affects the child's learning and development.

Hearing Impairment (HI): There must be documentation by an appropriate specialist that the hearing impairment affects the child's learning and development.

Classroom Model

The Early Childhood Special Education Program is for children with significant developmental delays between the ages of two years, nine months to five years. They are not yet the required age for kindergarten. The students receive services a minimum of 360 minutes per week. Each student is provided with an Individual Education Program (IEP) which is based on the student's needs and strengths as determined by assessments, observations, home and school inventories. Students may participate in school activities with typical peers as appropriate. Each program is served by a certified Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teacher and at least one Instructional Assistant.

A Speech and Language Pathologist works with each classroom both in designing and implementing IEP's.

Occupational and Physical Therapy services are available to all students on a consult basis. Direct therapy is available to those students who qualify for it as part of their educational program.

Continuum of Services

Each child with a disability has a right to Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The IEP team determines what level of service the child needs in order to meet their goals. There are several levels of service and service models that the IEP team may consider from:

Community Education Preschool Program – This program is composed primarily of typically developing peers ranging in age 3 years, 9 months to kindergarten age. Instruction is provided by certified staff and instructional assistant(s) using pre-academic based curriculum. Special Education services related to the IEP are typically provided by the onsite support staff with consult services available as needed.

Head Start – This program is composed primarily of typically developing peers ranging from age 3 years to kindergarten age and who may be at risk for learning difficulties. Instruction is provided by Head Start staff. A major component of the program is the availability of social services for the families. Parent participation is strongly encouraged. Special Education services related to the IEP are typically provided by Special Education support staff either on a direct or consultative basis. The family must meet the Federal poverty guidelines as part of the financial eligibility criteria. This requirement can be waived for special needs children.

Mesa Early Learning Program (MELP) – This program services students who are 4 years old before September 1, of the school year. Instruction is provided by certified staff and instructional assistant(s). Special Education services related to an IEP will be served by district special education staff. The family must meet the Federal poverty guidelines as part of the financial eligibility criteria.

Family Tree – This program is a family literacy program providing general education and/or English instruction to adults. A preschool component is available at most locations to provide child care and parents training. Special Education services related to an IEP will be served on an itinerant/resource basis by district special education staff.

Cross-Categorical Classrooms – The cross-categorical classrooms serve students who are Preschool Speech and Language Delayed, Preschool Moderate Delayed or Preschool Severely Delayed. Instruction is provided in small and large groups, as well as individually for work on specific skills.

Specialized Self-Contained Preschool Classrooms – These classrooms serve students whose needs cannot be met in cross-categorical classroom setting.

Severe Multiple Delays – This preschool environment provides services for students whose current evaluation places them in the Severely Delayed range of functioning and who have significant medical or developmental needs that require more intensive support that cannot be provided within a cross-categorical setting. Instruction is provided individually and/or in small groups.

Hearing Impaired – This preschool environment serves hearing impaired students who are mild to profoundly hearing impaired. Two models are available.

- (a) An oral model in which students learn speech reading, listening skills, and speech and language development using an oral motor mode.
- (b) A total communication model in which students need to use sign language as a communication mode, receptively and expressively, in addition to speech reading, listening skills, and speech and language development.

Social/Communication/Sensory – This preschool environment provides a highly structured setting for students who have significant social, communication and sensory needs that cannot be met in a cross-categorical setting. Instruction is provided individually and/or in small groups.

Homebound – This environment is available to children who are unable to attend school due to health or medical reasons. A homebound application must be provided verifying that the child will be absent from school for a period of not less than 3 months, (either consecutively or cumulatively). Special Education services related to an IEP will be provided in the home by district Special Education/Homebound staff.

Dismissal/Termination

Dismissal/Termination from the ECSE programs is a goal for many children. Sometimes dismissal/termination occurs before the transition to kindergarten. Determination of dismissal from services can be based upon:

- Attainment of all current goals;
- Review of existing data;
- Further evaluation; or
- Assessment that indicates the child is functioning within expected limits in all developmental areas.

If dismissal/termination is indicated, the child's last day would be the date the IEP team meets and determines dismissal/termination.

Registration/Enrollment

All ECSE students preparing to attend the Mesa Public Schools program must complete a registration packet before entrance to the program. Please take the following information to the school office:

- a) Registration Packet
- b) Birth Certificate
- c) Immunization Record Card (must be original, not a copy)
- d) Proof of Residency (i.e., utility bill, drivers license)

Special needs children are released from the program under one of the following conditions:

- The child does not attend for 10 consecutive days without notice from the parent as to the reason for absence.
- The parent withdraws the child from the school by completing the necessary paperwork.
- The evaluation team determines that the child is no longer eligible for special education.

Attendance

Regular attendance at our ECSE programs and being prompt is both appreciated and expected. If it is necessary for a child to be kept at home, please call and report his/her absence to the school attendance office.

Hours of Operation

Our ECSE classrooms have a morning session from 9:15 to 11:45 am and an afternoon session from 12:45 to 3:15 pm. Classes are three days a week; Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday or Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Transportation

Bus transportation is provided by the school district for the ECSE students. Parents have the option to waive the right to transportation if they prefer to take their child to and from school. Bus transportation is provided only to destinations *within* the Mesa Public Schools boundaries. For any questions regarding where your child may be picked up and dropped off, please call the Transportation Department at (480) 472-0160 or (480) 472-8950. Parents must have children ready when the bus arrives. If they are not ready, the bus cannot wait and the parent will be responsible for transportation.

Backpacks

Please provide your child with a bag or backpack big enough to hold a folder with his/her name on it. It will be used to transport papers, artwork and special items. We ask that you put it in a special place so it will be available to your child when he/she prepares to come to school. A great deal of learning can take place as your child takes on responsibility of his/her backpack. Please check your child's backpack daily.

Medical Conditions and Adminstrating Medication

Parents of guardians of any child enrolled in the Mesa Public School District must notify the teacher and school nurse of any medical conditions requiring special attention or consideration, including any known allergies. Children with an infections disease shall be excluded from school.

A medication consent form will need to be completed by the child's parent/guardian and kept in the school health office for any child requiring the administration of any medication during the day. The school nurse or health assistant will administer the medicine. Any medicine must be in the original container and clearly labeled. The medication must be handed to a staff member by the parent/guardian. Do not send the medication with the child.

Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting

Federal law mandates that any unexplained injuries or marks be reported immediately to the local police department and Child Protective Services (CPS) by all school personnel. Please call your child's teacher or the health office to report ANY injuries or marks.

Fire Drills

It is required by law that fire drills be conducted no less that once every thirty days. Emergency evacuation plans are posted in each child's classroom.

Snacks

Children in all programs will have a snack. We will provide juice and crackers. If your child requires a specialized snack, we ask that the parents provide the snack items for their child. However, parents may be asked to contribute nutritional snack items for the class.

Clothing

Dress your child in comfortable clothing that they can get messy while they play. Each child should have an extra set of clothing in the event of a toileting accident, spill, etc. Please label all your child's personal possessions. We believe in outdoor play for all children so dress your child for the weather.

Separation Anxiety

It is very common for young children to be anxious when separated from parents. Children need to be assured that separation will result in reunion. Please say good-bye to your child when you drop him/her off at the school and if necessary, reassure him/her of your return. Each child is unique and we will work to ease the separation anxiety issues.

Home Visits

During the school year, your child's teacher will be making two visits to your home. The home visit (usually about 30 minutes) is a time for the child to have the teacher in their home and to strengthen the bridge between home and school. Parents should save adult concerns and conversation with the teacher at another time, not in the child's presence.