

STEPPING STONES CHILDREN'S CENTER SCHOOL AGE FAMILY HANDBOOK

Richland

Wexford

Hance

Eden Hall

Haine

Connoquenessing Valley

Ehrman Crest

Rowan

2024-2025 ACADEMIC SCHOOL YEAR

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Introduction

Welcome to the School Age Stepping Stones program! This handbook outlines program policies for our School Age Programs located inside the Pine Richland and Seneca Valley school districts. Policies are aligned with district guidelines and in compliance with state and local regulations. Health and safety policies are outlined based on the most up-to-date standards as outlined in Caring for Our Children, 4th Edition. Stepping Stones maintains compliance with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services regulations and participates in the Keystone Stars Program.

Stepping Stones Children’s Center (SSCC) is a private, non-profit, corporation established in 1979 to provide care and education for children and their families in Allegheny and Butler counties. We have been providing high quality school age programming in the Pine Richland school district since 1993 and in the Seneca Valley school district since 2012. The school age programs are staffed with trained early childhood professionals. Each school location has a Site Director who is responsible for management of everyday operations, planning, and implementing program activities as well as maintaining open parent-teacher communication. Group Supervisors plan and implement program activities. Assistant Group Supervisors assist the leads in each classroom.

Philosophy

We believe in educating the whole child in an environment in which children feel safe and can thrive. Our childcare programs help children achieve developmental goals that are critical in the early years and foster those goals throughout their adolescent years. Stepping Stones provides a hands-on learning environment that helps children learn through play and experiences, while also meeting the goals of state standards. Our qualified teachers are responsive to the needs and development milestones of each child.

Mission Statement

Stepping Stones is committed to providing high quality education and childcare in an environment that fosters positive relationships among our children, staff, families, and the community we serve. We establish a continuity of care by providing meaningful childcare experiences from infancy to early adolescents. Our students, parents, and staff will work together to build an atmosphere where each and every child can learn and respect one another in an academic, physical, and social environment.

Vision Statement

Stepping Stones Children’s Center will strive to be an organization that exemplifies growth and opportunity for children, their families, and our community at large, by providing the following:

- Implementing research-based curriculum that supports the academic, physical, and social learning needs of every child
- A future that is brighter, safer, and more productive for children

- Wider understanding of the needs of children and families
- Early identification, intervention, and programming for children with special needs
- More effective networking with childhood programs to incorporate meaningful, learning experiences

School Age Program Goals

Stepping Stones Children’s Center strives to achieve the following goals in our school age programs:

- Provide children with opportunities to explore, discover and learn through hands-on activities in a safe and supportive environment
- Stay current with ongoing trends in early childhood education to provide high quality programs in emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development.
- To provide a balance of independent, small, and large group activities that includes creative play, educational centers, and physical/motor development
- Maintain a safe, comfortable, clean, aesthetically pleasing, and fun environment to promote healthy social development
- To teach, value, and respect the diversity of children, families, and staff to create a positive environment that fosters emotional growth
- Staff programs with trained and knowledgeable educators who provide developmentally appropriate experiences in accordance with PA Learning Standards and DHS regulations
- Maintain high standards of ethical conduct, professionalism, and confidentiality

Program Information

Before and After School Programs

Each Before and After School program offers a variety of lessons based on the PA Early Learning Standards. The After School program offers snack and provides time for children to complete their homework with the assistance of after school teachers.

Stepping Stones Children’s Center offers before and after school programming in the following locations:

SCHOOL	HOURS OF OPERATIONS (Monday-Friday)
Pine Richland (Richland, Wexford, Hance)	7:00am-9:00am/ 3:45-6:00pm
Eden Hall (located at Main Center)	7:00am-8:00am/ 3:30-6:00pm
Seneca Valley (Haine, Rowan, Connoquenessing Valley, Ehrman Crest)	7:00am- 8:55am/ 3:15-6:00pm

Stepping Stones Kindergarten Program (LEAP)

To meet the need for an extended day kindergarten program in our community, Stepping Stones Children’s Center created a half day kindergarten program to provide care for the alternate half of the kindergarten school day. The kindergarten program, also referred to as LEAP (Learning Extension and Play) is an academic based program that incorporates the PA Early Learning Standards. The LEAP

program offers a mix between academic and play based hands-on learning experiences. Lessons incorporate a weekly theme and reviews the skills that the children are learning through the district.

Stepping Stones Children’s Center offers the LEAP program in the following schools:

SCHOOL	HOURS OF OPERATIONS (Monday-Friday)
Pine Richland (Richland, Wexford, Hance)	9:00am-1:00pm/11:45am-3:30pm
Seneca Valley (Haine, Rowan, Connoquenessing Valley, Ehrman Crest)	8:55am-12:45pm/11:30am-3:15pm

Contact Information

Administration

Director of School Age Programs

Ashley Thorne
 Email: schoolage@stepstonescc.org
 Phone: 724-625-2199 ext. 235

Director of Operations

Christine Macedonia
 Email: cmacedonia@stepstonescc.org
 Phone: 724-625-2199 ext. 225

Assistant Director of School Age Programs

Jody Posey
 Email: jody@stepstonescc.org
 Phone: 724-625-2199 ext. 234

Accountant

Kerri Rudolph
 Email: familyaccounts@stepstonescc.org
 Phone: 724-625-2199 ext. 228

Pine Richland Programs

Hance Elementary

5518 Molnar Drive
 Gibsonia, PA 15044
 724-321-8552
hance@stepstonescc.org

Wexford Elementary

250 Brown Road
 Gibsonia, PA 15044
 724-321-8556
wexford@stepstonescc.org

Richland Elementary

3811 Bakerstown Road
 Gibsonia, PA 15044
 724-321-8554
richland@stepstonescc.org

Eden Hall

712 Warrendale Road
 Gibsonia, PA 15044
 724-553-6707
edenhall@stepstonescc.org

Seneca Valley Programs

Haine Elementary

1516 Haine School Road
 Cranberry TWP, PA 16066
 724-487-2020
haine@stepstonescc.org

Rowan Elementary

8051 Rowan Road
 Cranberry TWP, PA 16066
 724-487-2019
rowan@stepstonescc.org

Ehrman Crest Elementary

2070 Ehrman Road
 Cranberry TWP, PA 16066
 724-487-3444
ec@stepstonescc.org

Connoquenessing Valley (CVE)

300 S. Pittsburgh Street
 Zelienople, PA 16063
 724-487-3483
cve@stepstonescc.org

ADMISSION POLICIES

Non-Discrimination Policy

Stepping Stones Children's Center school age programs admits children in grades kindergarten through sixth grade. 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 aids and the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods.

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

Stepping Stones Children's Center

712 Warrendale Rd
Gibsonia, PA 15044
724-625-2199
maura@stepstonescc.org

Office for Civil Rights

U.S Department of Health and Human Services
Centralized Case Management Operations
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 509F HHH Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20201
Customer Response Center: (800) 368-1019
TDD: (800) 537-7697
<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints>
Email: ocrmail@hhs.gov

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Department of Human Services
Bureau of Equal Opportunity
Room 225, Health & Welfare Building
P.O. Box 2675 Harrisburg, PA 17120
Inquiries: 717-787-1127
Email: RA-PWBEOAO@pa.gov

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

333 Market Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
<http://www.phrc.pa.gov/File-a-complaint>
Inquiries: 717-787-4410
TTY users only: 717-787-7279

Special Needs

Stepping Stones does not discriminate or limit the enrollment of children with special needs as long as a safe environment can be provided, and the admission of the student does not pose a direct threat to the health and safety of other staff and children in the program. Stepping Stones will make reasonable accommodations, modifications and provide supports, unless this presents a fundamental alteration to the program. Stepping Stones is not able to provide diapering or toileting assistance in our School Age Programs.

Request for IEP

If your child has an IEP/IFSP/504 Plan, we ask that you provide Stepping Stones with a copy. Stepping Stones staff will work with families to provide support within our means to do so. Stepping Stones is not able to provide one-on-one support but will provide the family with resources to outside agencies.

Registration and Enrollment

School Age Program registration for the 2024-2025 school year opens on June 3rd for Pine Richland programs and June 10th for Seneca Valley programs. Registrations can be completed electronically through our website at stepstonescc.org under *Registration and Forms*. Registrations are accepted and processed on a first come, first served basis. Registrations do not roll over from a previous school year. Fully completed registrations are required before a child can attend a Stepping Stones's program. All registrations will be reviewed and processed by the Director of School Age Programs. Upon acceptance into the school age program, families will receive a confirmation email with a start date.

The following registration information is required, in entirety, before the first day of attendance:

- A completed emergency contact form through the School Care Works registration portal
- Health Assessment and Immunization Records
 - Health Assessments must be signed and dated by the doctor and completed on or after a child's 5th birthday. Health Assessments will need to be updated when a child turns 12 years old. Approved health assessment forms can be found on our website at stepstonescc.org under *Registration and Forms*.
- An agreement will be sent from Adobe Sign to be electronically signed. This will need to be completed prior to the first day of attendance.
- Registration Fee

Tuition Policies

Tuition

The tuition rates for Stepping Stones Children's Center School Age Programs vary based on the number of days and programs enrolled in. A complete breakdown of pricing for the 2024-2025 school year can be located on our website at stepstonescc.org under *Registration and Forms*. Tuition rates are updated annually to stay in line with the increased cost of childcare programming.

All families must have automatic payments set up through their Parent Portal account. Approved payment methods are ACH bank accounts, Visa, and Mastercard. Cash and checks will not be accepted and should not be given to classroom teachers or sent into school with your child. Tuition will be charged to the payment method on your Parent Connect Portal account on the 1st of every month. If the 1st of the month falls on a weekend or holiday, tuition will be charged on the next business day that Stepping Stones is open.

Program expenses are consistent, even when a child misses due to illness, vacation, etc.. ***Therefore, we cannot extend and/or reimburse tuition or reschedule missed days.*** To compensate for this fact, monthly tuition is based on a 20 day average.

Tuition for August and June are prorated, based on your child's scheduled enrollment.

Tuition includes afternoon snack for the After School program.

Fees and Late Payments

A \$100 non-refundable registration fee will be charged at the time a registration is submitted. For families with multiple children, a \$50 non-refundable registration fee will apply for each additional

child. If a registration fee is not paid with 14 days of enrollment, your spot in the program may be forfeited.

A 3% credit card fee is added for each processed credit card payment.

A \$45 charge will be added for any returned payments.

A late payment of \$35 will be charged if a full payment has not been received in ten (10) business days.

A holding fee of 50% of tuition, per child, will be required to hold your child's spot in a program. A holding fee can only be used to hold a spot for a maximum of three months.

After 14 days, if tuition has not been paid, childcare services may be withheld until payment is received. If there is a waitlist, your child will be unenrolled until another spot becomes available.

Discounts

A 10% older sibling discount will be applied to the older siblings enrolled. Discounts do not apply for children enrolled in *AS NEEDED* or *Extra Day* charges.

Schedules and Changes

There is a two day minimum required for enrollment. Care is able to be provided on a drop-in basis for *AS NEEDED* enrollments.

Extra days of care are available, space permitting, with prior notification. In the event of a two hour delay, extra care can be provided if space is available. Extra days of care can be scheduled by contacting your program's Site Director. The extra day rate will be applied. A complete list of extra day rates by program can be found on our website at stepstonescc.org under *Registration and Forms*.

Tuition rates are based on consistent weekly schedules. For families whose days of care vary week to week, they will be billed the variable tuition rate of one day higher. If you need a variable schedule, please contact the Director of School Age Programs directly.

SSCC requires a two week notice of cancellation or reduction of care prior to the 1st of the month. No tuition reimbursements will be given on/after the first of the month. Requests must be made directly to the Director of School Age Programs and/or Accountant. To make changes to your schedule or add days, please email the Director of School Age Programs at schoolage@stepstonescc.org.

As Needed

For care that is less than two days per week or on a drop-in basis, *AS NEEDED* enrollment is available. *AS NEEDED* care is billed at a daily rate based on days of attendance. A complete list of *AS NEEDED* rates by program can be found on our website at stepstonescc.org under *Registration and Forms*.

For children who are enrolled in *AS NEEDED*, a spot in the program is not saved and care can only be provided if space is available. *AS NEEDED* care can be scheduled by contacting your program's Site Director. A registration needs to be completed prior to *AS NEEDED* care being provided.

All Care Days

Days that the school district is closed, and SSCC remains open are called "All Care Days". Sign-ups for All Care Days will be sent out, via email, two weeks prior. If your child is regularly scheduled to attend

before school, kindergarten, or after school on the day an All Care Day falls, there is no additional charge.

If an All Care Day falls on a day that your child is not enrolled for or if your child is enrolled AS NEEDED, a \$90 fee will be charged upon sign up. Since All Care Day expenses are consistent even if a child does not attend, Stepping Stones will not be able to offer a refund or credit for a missed All Care Day.

ELRC

Stepping Stones Children's Center accepts subsidy payments through the ELRC. For more information about applying for subsidy through the ELRC, please contact the numbers below:

- Allegheny County- 412-350-3577
- Butler County- 724-285-9431

Families who are receiving subsidy through ELRC, may have a weekly copay. Applications through the ELRC will need to be updated annually.

If you are receiving subsidy through ELRC and need to make a schedule changes, you must contact ELRC directly, as well as Stepping Stones, to make them aware of the change.

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICIES

Illness Policy and Medical Exclusion

Stepping Stones Children's Center prioritizes the safety and health of the children in our care. When your child becomes ill at a School Age Program, we will remove your child from the group and create a comfortable space for your child to rest. Stepping Stones teachers will first contact the parents and/or guardians to pick up your child. If we are unable to reach the parent and/or guardian, we will contact the next emergency contact on your child's emergency contact form.

A child may not be sent into the School Age Program and may be sent home if the following conditions are displayed:

- A temperature of 100.4 °
- One or more episode of vomiting, regardless of cause
- One or more episodes of diarrhea
- Contagious illness and diseases including, but not limited to flu, COVID, measles, chicken pox, mumps, roseola, fifth disease, hand foot and mouth, conjunctivitis (pink eye), head lice, strep throat
- Behavior indicating distress or pain
- Severe cold, excessive coughing, sneezing, and/or excessive nose drainage causing inability to participate in the daily routine

A child may also be excluded from the program if:

- The child's illness prevents the child from participating in activities that the facility routinely offers

- The illness requires more care than the staff can provide without compromising the needs of the other children in the group
- Keeping the child in care poses an increased risk to the child or to the children and adults with whom the child will come in contact

Stepping Stones Children’s Center will follow the recommendations of *Caring for our Children* for exclusions practices. In most cases, children will need to be symptom free for 24 hours without the use of medication.

Notification of Infectious and Communicable Diseases

Stepping Stones Children’s Center is required to report certain illnesses and diseases to the Department of Human Services and Health Department. Parents should notify their child’s program teacher within 24 hours if their child has developed a known or suspected communicable illness.

The Director of School Age Programs will report the illness to the appropriate agencies. The program’s Site Director will notify families through email of signs and symptoms of the disease, incubation period and any other information that would be helpful to preventing the spread of disease.

Illness Prevention

Stepping Stones Children’s Center tries diligently to minimize illness and infections and to control the spread of disease with the following measures:

- Disinfecting high touch and play areas daily
- Cleaning and sanitizing the eating areas thoroughly before and after each meal or snack.
- Washing hands repeatedly
- Deep cleaning areas after reported illness

Handwashing

All staff and children are required to wash their hands at a minimum at the following times:

- Upon entering the program
- Before and after handling food
- Before giving medication
- After using the restroom
- After handling bodily fluids
- After playing outside
- After using sand and art materials

Hand sanitizer is not permitted to be used as a substitution for soap and water. Hand sanitizer should not be kept on a child or in their backpack.

Administration of Medication

Stepping Stones Children’s Center will administer medication only if the parent or legal guardian has provided the appropriate documentation. Medication will be kept in a locked box out of the reach of children with a signed medication log. Medication will be administered in accordance with DHS regulation 055 Pa. Code 3270.133.

Medication and the administration of medication must meet the following guidelines:

- Be in the original container. If a prescription medication, the container must include the prescription label.
- Prescription and nonprescription medications must identify the name of the medication and name of the child receiving medication.
- Medication should only be given in the manner as described on the label and only given to the intended child.

A medication log is required for medication stored in the program. The medication log should be kept with the medication and include the following information:

- The name of the medication
- The name of the child receiving the medication
- If the medication needs refrigeration
- Amount of medication to be administered
- Date of administration
- Time of administration
- The initials of the staff person who administered the medication
- Parent or guardian signature

Severe Allergies and Medical Conditions

When enrolling a child who has severe allergies or medical conditions in the program, special preparations and extra documents are required to ensure the safety of the child. Parents are responsible to ensure that their child's program teacher is aware of the allergy and/or medical condition. Stepping Stones Children's Center does not have access to EPI-PENs or other medications that are stored in the school district nurse's office. Any medication will need to be given directly to Stepping Stones and be in accordance with the Administration of Medication policy listed above.

Families with children with extreme allergies will be asked to complete an Allergy Care Plan provided by Stepping Stones Children's Center. Parents and/or guardians are responsible for ensuring that the allergy is listed on the child's emergency contact form, all medications are properly labeled and provided to their program's teacher.

Injuries and Accidents

In the event that your child has a non-life threatening injury during program hours, SSCC staff will administer basic first aid procedures and complete an incident report either electronically through the Insite Parent Portal or a paper copy will be given to you at pick up. For incidents/injuries involving injuries to the head, ticks, excessive falls or inappropriate behavior, a phone call will be made immediately to the parent as well. The incident report will include the date, time, location of injury, and how injury was obtained.

In the event that your child is severely injured in the Stepping Stones program, the staff will take the appropriate steps to obtain emergency medical care. Depending on the nature of the injury or the child's reaction to the injury, a parent may be called and asked to pick up their child. We will make every

attempt to contact you, however; if we cannot reach a parent or guardian or the child needs immediate emergency services, we will have the child transported by ambulance to an emergency room. A teacher will accompany your child to hospital until a parent or guardian arrives. Staff will provide the hospital with the insurance information provided on the emergency contact form.

Emergency Operation Procedures

All Stepping Stones Children's Center School Age Programs have a site specific Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) that staff are trained in upon hire and annually thereafter. The Emergency Operation Plan is reviewed annually by the Director of School Age Programs and updated if necessary. The Emergency Operation Plan is sent to county and local Emergency Management Association. Parents are provided with a letter regarding the EOP at the time of enrollment. Part 1 of this plan is posted in the Family Licensing Binder at each school location.

Site Safety

All entrances to School Programs shall be locked during program hours. When arriving at the school location, use the doorbell system or call your program directly to notify our teachers of your arrival. Parents and children are only permitted to access Stepping Stones classrooms during program hours. Stepping Stones teachers are not permitted to allow families access to spaces inside the district that are not being used by Stepping Stones.

A Health and Safety Checklist is completed twice a school year by the program Site Director to assess and address safety concerns. Outdoor play spaces are assessed before use to check for signs of damage, dangerous items, or unstable items. No smoking, vaping, lethal weapons and/or guns are permitted on site.

Stepping Stones teachers are provided with photo identification badges.

Emergency Drills

Stepping Stones Children's Center takes the safety of our children very seriously by preparing for all types of emergencies. Each program participates in the following drills:

- Fire Drills- Fire drills are conducted on a monthly basis. Children practice locating emergency exits and safely exiting the building to a safe location. Teachers will take attendance before and after leaving the building.
- Lockdown Drills- Lockdown drills are conducted to prepare students if there is an intruder in the building.
- Extreme Weather- Students practice sheltering in place in the event of severe weather such as tornado or flood.

Supervision and Staff Requirements

Staff to Child Ratios

Stepping Stones Children's Center adheres to the DHS child to teacher ratio listed in 055 Pa. Code 3270.51 which are as follows

Young School Age (Kindergarten to 3rd grade) 1:12

Older School Age (4th to 6th grade) 1:15

When two age groups are mixed together, the age of the youngest child will determine the child to teacher ratio.

Clearances and Training

All Stepping Stones Children's Center employees working directly with children are required to obtain and have on file the following:

- Child Abuse Clearance
- State Police Clearance
- National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR)
- FBI Clearance
- CPR
- Fire Safety Training
- Emergency Operation Training
- Mandated Reporter Training

Mandated Reported and Suspected Abuse

Under the Child Protective Service Act, mandated Reporters are required to report any suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities. The employees of Stepping Stones Children's Center are considered mandated reporters under this law. The employees of Stepping Stones Children's Center are not required to discuss their suspicions with parents prior to reporting the matter to the appropriate authorities, nor are they required to investigate the cause of suspicious marks, behaviors, or conditions prior to making the report. Under the Child Protective Service Act, mandated reporters can be held criminally responsible if they fail to report suspected abuse or neglect. The Child Protective Service Act is designed to protect the welfare and best interest of all children.

Child Maltreatment

Stepping Stones Children's Center employees will receive training on child maltreatment, recognizing the potential signs, including but not limited to: unexplained burns, bruises, bites; frequent absence from school; lacking sufficient clothing; lack of proper hygiene; inappropriate behavior; extreme aggression, etc. Staff are trained to be able to identify signs of stress in families and assist by providing support and resources.

Shaken Baby Syndrome and Abusive Head Trauma

Stepping Stones Children's Center will receive training upon their initial hire to prevent and recognize potential signs of shaken baby syndrome/abusive head trauma, child maltreatment, neglect. These can be but not limited to: irritability, trouble staying awake, trouble breathing, vomiting, and inability to be woken up. SSCC employees will also learn strategies to cope with crying children, such as but not limited to, checking the child's needs, checking the child's environment, nurturing, soft music, taking a walk, asking for assistance; understanding the development of the brain in infancy and early childhood.

DROP OFF AND PICK UP PROCEDURES

Release of Child

Children will only be released to their parent, guardian or a person who is indicated as an emergency contact on a child's registration form. Any person picking up a child will need to have a picture ID available. Stepping Stones staff are required to ask for ID for any person who the staff do not recognize before releasing the child.

In the event you need to have a person who is not listed on your child's emergency contact form pick up your child; notify your child's program teacher through email by listing the full name and address of the person picking up your child.

Stepping Stones teachers will notify the police and the parent/guardian if an unauthorized person seeks custody of a child

Drop Off Procedures

Families are welcomed to enter our program at the appropriate opening time. We ask that families refrain from arriving prior to opening, as our teachers use this time to prepare for the day. Children must be accompanied to the door by an adult. Please do not remain in your vehicle.

Pick up Procedures

Parents and/or guardians are required to come to the door to pick up their child. We will not release any child to a parent who remains in their vehicle. Once you arrive, you are responsible for the supervision and safety of your child. For your child's safety, please make sure your child does not run in the hallways, rooms and/or parking lot.

Parking Lot

All children **MUST** be supervised in the parking lot. Please do not leave your vehicle running or leave a child unattended in your vehicle. Speed limits are posted in the parking area of each school and need to be followed at all times.

DHS regulation § 3270.177. Supervision:

- (a) Children may not be left unattended in a vehicle
- (b) Children shall be supervised during boarding and exiting vehicles by an adult who remains outside the vehicle

Absences

Please notify the Stepping Stones program teacher directly if your child will be absent for the day. If your child is missing due to illness, please notify the teachers of the illness so that proper illness prevention and documentation can take place.

If you know in advance that your child will not be attending Stepping Stones, you must notify Stepping Stones program teachers **AND** the school district. If we do not receive notice that a child should not be attending the after-school program, we will air on the side of caution and hold them in the after school program. Please refer to Tuition Policies regarding missed days and tuition.

Late Pick Up Policy

Children are expected to be picked up at the end of their scheduled program time. We recognize that on occasion an emergency may arise which causes you to be late to pick up your child. In such an event, **please call**, so that we may plan accordingly. In order to avoid additional programming fees, we must impose the following late policy whenever lateness is the routine rather than exception:

A late fee, as outlined in your agreement, will be charged at a rate of \$30 per half hour or fraction thereof. If your child attends the kindergarten program and has not been picked up by the end of the kindergarten day, you will be charged the extra day rate for the after-school program.

If you are running late for any reason, please make every attempt to contact the program teacher and provide an estimated time of arrival. If a parent is late and no contact has been made, the child's program teacher will attempt to contact the parent and the other emergency contacts listed on the child's form.

A parent who is late 3 times will receive a written notice requiring the family to make a plan for picking up their child on time. If the parent is late again, they will receive a final written warning. With the next lateness, the child will be dismissed from the program.

Impaired or Intoxicated Individual

If a parent or guardian arrives to pick up a child who appears to be under the influence of medication, alcohol, drugs or other substances, the Stepping Stones staff will ask the parent or guardian to arrange alternate transportation. The Stepping Stones staff will make the following attempts to delay the individual from taking the child:

- Every attempt will be made to contact another guardian or emergency contact to pick up the child.
- Explain to the individual that arrangements have been made for another guardian or emergency contact to pick up the child and they shall remain in our care until that time.
- If the individual becomes threatening or violent, they will be asked to leave the premise, and they police will be contacted if they refuse.
- If the individual forcefully takes the child and leaves, the police will be contacted immediately and notified that an impaired/intoxicated individual is leaving the center.
- Stepping Stones teachers cannot legally deny release to any parent, without a court order, to pick up their child, but we will make every attempt to keep the child safe.

Custody Agreements and Court Orders

In cases where a court order is put into place, a copy of the most recent order should be submitted to the Director of School Age Programs. This is especially important if there is an order that would deny or

limit the natural parents right to pick up the child. All situations and orders shared to the Director of School Age Programs will only be discussed or distributed on a need to know basis to other Stepping Stones employees. If a parent tried to pick up a child against a court order, Stepping Stones staff will notify the proper authorities and guardian.

Stepping Stones Children’s Center cannot, without a court order or PFA, limit the access of one parent by the request of another, regardless of reason.

CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMMING

Curriculum Statement

Stepping Stones Children’s Center is dedicated to creating a high quality programming for school age children. Providing diverse learning experiences allows our children to grow in all areas of development. Trained teachers create relationships with children that create the building blocks for motivating each child to succeed. By focusing on the whole child development, Stepping Stones teachers are able to implement developmentally appropriate practices that increase children’s emotional, social, physical and cognitive growth.

Learning Standards

All Stepping Stones programs utilize the *Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood* as a framework for curriculum and lesson plan development. Weekly thematic lesson plans for each program are posted in the program space. The core components of the *Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood* are:

- Approaches to Play and Learning- Constructing, Organizing and Applying Knowledge
- Language and Literacy Development- English Language Arts
- Mathematical Thinking and Expression- Exploring, Processing, and Problem-Solving
- Scientific Thinking and Technology- Exploring, Scientific Inquiry and Discovery
- Social Studies Thinking- Connecting to Communities
- Creative Thinking and Expression- Communicating through the Arts
- Health, Wellness, and Physical Development- Learning About My Body
- Social and Emotional Development- Student Interpersonal Skills
- Partnerships for Learning- Families, Schools, and Communities

Conferences and Assessments

Conferences are offered twice per year to discuss the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) and your child’s growth and development in the program. These conferences are generally held in November and April of each school year. Conferences can be held in person or over the phone.

A DRDP will be completed on every child enrolled in the program, with the exception of children enrolled for AS NEEDED. Parents will be asked to sign the DRDP and can request a copy. DRDPs and conference notes are documented and kept in the child’s file in the administrative office for future reference and to meet state and STARS regulations and requirements.

Personal Items

Children may need to have some personal items on hand while they are enrolled in the program. It is extremely important that all your child's belongings, including but not limited to: jackets, water bottles, backpacks, etc., are labeled with your child's first and last name. We suggest that kindergarten aged children have an extra set of clothes in their backpack.

Electronics are not permitted in the program unless permission has been previously given from a staff member. Cell phones are expressly prohibited.

Children are responsible for their personal items and Stepping Stones Children's Center is not responsible for any items that are lost, broken and/or stolen. All children that are enrolled in Stepping Stones Children's Center programs are consistently well supervised, however, accidents do happen. By enrolling your child in Stepping Stones Children's Center, you assume all risk for any damaged, lost, or stolen belongings.

Cell Phone Policy

To provide a safe environment for your children and protect each child, Stepping Stones follows a "No Cell Phone Policy" for students. If you need to contact your child during program hours, please call the classroom phone. Program phone numbers are listed in the beginning of this handbook. If a child brings a cell phone to the program, they will be asked to keep it in their backpack at all times. In the event a child continuously retrieves their cell phone, the Stepping Stones teacher will hold on to the cell phone until that child leaves and it can be returned to the parent/guardian.

Screen Time

Stepping Stones Children's Center follows the recommendations of NAYEC and the Fred Rogers Center regarding screen time and technology. This position is as follows: *Technology and interactive media are tools that can promote effective learning and development when they are used intentionally by early childhood educators, within the framework of developmentally appropriate practices, to support learning goals established for individual children.*

- Above all, the use of technology and tools and interactive media should not harm children.
- Developmentally appropriate practices and professional judgement must guide decisions about whether and when to integrate technology and interactive media into early childhood programs.
- Appropriate use of technology and media depends on the age, developmental levels, needs, interests, linguistic backgrounds and abilities of each child.
- Effective uses of technology and media are active, hands-on, engaging and empowering; give the child control; provide adaptive scaffolds to ease the accomplishment of tasks, and are used as one of many options to support children's learning.
- When used appropriately, technology and media can enhance children cognitive and social abilities.
- Interactions with technology and media should be playful and support creativity, exploration, pretend play, active play, and outdoor activities.
- Individual screen time use will be limited to 20 minutes per day.
- Mealtimes shall remain screen free.

Homework

Stepping Stones Children’s Center provides homework assistance in the after school program. Students are given 30 minutes of quiet homework time to complete their assignments. Students are permitted to work on their homework after the homework time has ended, but other students will be able to move and speak freely in the classroom. Stepping Stones teachers are not permitted to search through children’s backpacks and belonging to see if they were assigned homework. Students are responsible for taking it upon themselves to retrieve their homework from their backpack. Stepping Stones teachers are available to assist with homework, but are not able to provide individualized tutoring.

Inclusion

The ADA is committed to a culture of diversity and inclusion to foster a safe and equitable environment for its membership. In this environment, representation matters, and every member is provided intentional opportunities to make meaningful contributions. Diverse viewpoints and needs are heard, valued, and respected.

In compliance with federal law, Stepping Stones Children’s Center does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, military service, covered veterans status, or genetic information in its administration of educational policies, programs, activities. Parents will be informed of their rights regarding inclusion upon enrollment. The Americans with Disabilities Act can be accessed through this link: [Guide to Disability Rights Laws | ADA.gov](#)

Stepping Stones Children’s Center uses developmentally appropriate practices and considers the unique needs of all children when planning. Stepping Stones will actively include young children with disabilities or special needs by utilizing the step listed below:

- When developmental concerns arise, Stepping Stones teachers will first document behaviors. Documentation may include, but is not limited to: running records, frequency checklist, ABC observations.
- The observations will be reviewed by classroom teachers to determine patterns of behavior and develop interventions for that child. Stepping Stones teachers will offer interventions, as long as the intervention or supports do not cause a safety concern or unmanageable hardship for the program. Supports may be, but are not limited to: transition reminders, visual schedules, and differentiated instruction.
- Stepping Stones teachers will reach out to parents and/or guardians through email or phone to address developmental concerns and interventions. If needed, a parent-teacher conference will be scheduled to address strengths and next steps for growth.
- Stepping Stones will connect parents and request partnerships from outside agencies including, but not limited to: IECMH, AIU, ELRC Region 5 Rapid Response, and Trying Together.

IEP/IFSP

If a child enrolled in the program has an IEP or IFSP, a copy will be requested for the child’s file. With the family’s permission, Stepping Stones teachers will participate in the implementation of the IEP/IFSP. We will work with the family to provide consistency within the Stepping Stones program and the school district.

Dual Language Learners/ ESL

Stepping Stones Children's Center strives to support children in language development. Children who do not speak English as a first language will be supported in the classroom. To support communication between home and school, teachers will use Google Translate. Every classroom is equipped with an iPad and iPhone that includes a Translate app. The child's language will be represented in the classroom. The teacher will label centers and materials in the child's first language. Teachers will do their best to have books available in the child's first language or have them interpreted while reading.

Transition Policy

At Stepping Stones, we take steps to ensure smooth transitions between programs and activities.

- Initial Enrollment- Families and children are invited to tour the facility and meet the classroom teachers. Stepping Stones School Age Programs follow the school districts calendar for "Find Your Classroom" days. Children and families are given time to explore the classroom and materials, while also having time to become comfortable with classroom routines and teachers.
- Transition to Kindergarten- Parents are invited to tour the classroom prior to the first day of school. Children and families transitioning to kindergarten in Pine Richland and Seneca Valley will participate in activities coordinated between the school district and our program.
- Transition to Self-Care- Stepping Stones uses "Kids in Control: A Kid's Guide to Being Responsible" to help children become independent to transition out of childcare. Kids in Control is given to parents as a resource and activities are completed throughout the school year to help prepare students for real life situations and scenarios.

Continuity of Care

To support transitions, Stepping Stones aims to provide consistency through the program through continuity of care. Stepping Stones teachers build rapport with the children and families through community events, family engagement opportunities, and positive interactions. Stepping Stones teachers stay consistent from one year to the next in the before and after school program and by providing regular routines, smooth and consistent transition schedules, and nurturing relationships, children will enhance long term relationships and support continuity of care.

School Delays and Cancellations

In the event of inclement weather or school district closure, Stepping Stones will follow the following procedures:

- District closes due to inclement weather- Stepping Stones school age programs will also close to ensure the safety of our staff and students.
- District delay due to inclement weather- Stepping Stones school age programs will operate at an 8:00 am start.
- District closures or delays due to temperature- Stepping Stones will remain open for our regular program hours. In this case, please send your child with a packed lunch as the cafeteria will not be open.

Meals

Before School Program- Children are able to purchase breakfast through the school cafeteria. Parents are also able to send in a packed breakfast if they prefer. In the event of an in-service day, snow day, or holiday in which Stepping Stones is providing an All Care Day, Stepping Stones will provide breakfast.

Kindergarten Program- Children are able to purchase lunch through the school cafeteria. The parent/guardian is responsible for setting up a lunch account through the school district. Site Directions at each location will send out directions on how to place your child's lunch order. In the event of an in-service day, snow day, or holiday in which Stepping Stones is providing an All Care Day, students will need a packed lunch

After School Program- Afternoon snack is provided by Stepping Stones. Snack is served upon arrival in the after school program. If a child has an allergy, the parents will receive a list of snack items from Stepping Stones inventory and the program will order additional items to substitute. Stepping Stones is not able to purchase individual specialty items for diet restrictions that are not of a medical nature.

FAMILY AND CHILD CONDUCT

Conduct Policy

Stepping Stones Children's Center prioritizes creating a safe and welcoming environment for staff, children and families. Parents, children and teachers are required to behave in a manner consistent with decency, courtesy and respect. The following policy encompasses actions committed by a child, parent/guardian or staff to another individual. The Director may suspend or terminate care to child or family for the following types of misconduct:

- Injuring another person
- Verbal or physical threats
- Bringing in or using illegal substances
- Engaging in fighting
- Failure to consistently follow program rules and procedures
- Stealing or vandalizing another person's property
- Running from group/classroom space or running from group during outings
- Swearing, cursing and inappropriate language, whether at another person or during a Stepping Stones program

Discipline Policy

Stepping Stones Children's Center expects that each individual will be respectful and responsible for their behavior. It is expected that children will need help learning the rules of the classroom and may need redirection in learning, developing, and maintaining appropriate behavior. Praise and positive reinforcement are effective methods of the behavior management of children. When children receive positive, non-violent, and understanding interactions from adults and others, they develop good self-concepts, problem solving abilities, and self-discipline.

Physical Punishment

Acts of physical or corporal punishment from a parent or staff are not permitted in Stepping Stones programs. While verbal reprimands can be appropriate, verbal abuse, such as threats or insults, are not appropriate in Stepping Stones programs.

Suspension and Expulsion

Stepping Stones Children's Center will make every effort to prevent suspension and expulsion. Stepping Stones has created a policy to address the steps the organization will take to prevent suspension and/or expulsion and to develop a procedure to ensure that suspension/expulsion is only used as a last resort.

1. Stepping Stones Children's Center utilizes positive guidance and redirection to help children develop age appropriate self-control. Our teachers take the time to reward and reinforce positive behavior and encourage sharing, kindness, expressing their negative feelings and emotions in an appropriate manner.
2. Some children may not respond to positive support and behaviors can escalate to an area of concern. If behavior becomes consistent and concerning, staff will document the behavior and take the following steps:
 - Assess the classroom environment using informal assessments and formal assessment such as but not limited to: ECERS-3, SACERS-U, SPQA
 - Document concerning behaviors using informal and formal observations such as but not limited to: ABC observations, frequency checklist, running records
 - Complete a DRDP-SA child assessment
 - Utilize the *Behavioral Health Toolkit for Afterschool Programs* to identify the behavior and research possible supports that can be implemented
 - Meet with the family to discuss strategies used to modify or eliminate the behavior and identify changes needed to support success. The *Behavioral Health Toolkit for Afterschool Program* can be shared with families to offer at home support.
3. If deemed necessary by the program Director, the staff will be enrolled in Professional Development to further understanding of challenging behaviors and disabilities.
4. If the child has a documented IEP, Stepping Stones staff will offer to be part of or provide feedback for a child's IEP meeting. If able, Stepping Stones will use strategies listed in the IEP to support behaviors. Stepping Stones may not be able to utilize or implement all strategies provided by the school district.
5. If behaviors persist, Program Directors will reach out to external supports such as but not limited to: STARS Quality Coach, ELRC Region 5 Rapid Response, SACC Mental Health Consultation, IECMH, behavior specialist or the students existing behavioral team. The Program Directors will meet with the family to determine if suspension is required to maintain safety while external supports are put into place. A behavior plan will be put into place.
6. The effectiveness of the behavior plan with the external supports will be evaluated in thirty (30) days unless behaviors cause a need for earlier reevaluation.

If after steps listed above have been exhausted, the child's parent or guardian will be notified in writing of the behaviors warranting a suspension/expulsion.

Suspension

A suspension is meant to be a period of time for the family to work with the child on their behavior. The length of the suspension will be determined at the discretion of the center and the parents will receive written notice of the expected behavioral changes required for the child to return to the center. Failure of the child/parent to comply with the terms of the behavior plan may result in the permanent expulsion from the center.

Expulsion

The parent/guardian will be given a specific expulsion date. At the discretion of the Director, the parents/guardians will be given time to seek alternate child care. The expulsion may take effect immediately depending on the risk and/or safety concerns of the behavior to other children, families, or staff.

Immediate Expulsion

We will make every effort to work with families in the event that expulsion from the program is necessary. However, if a child or parent/guardian presents a direct threat to their own safety or the safety of others, the Director may impose an immediate expulsion. These threats can include, but are not limited to, physical violence and verbal or implied threats.

Parental Actions for Child's Suspension/Expulsion

The following are reasons while we may have to terminate or suspend a child from the program due to parental or guardian actions. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Failure to pay/habitual lateness in payments
- Failure to submit or complete required forms
- Habitual tardiness when picking up child
- Physical or verbal aggression to staff, children or other families
- Bullying staff, children or other families
- Destruction of program property

Child's Actions for Suspension/Expulsion

The following are reasons why we may have to terminate or suspend a child from the program. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Uncontrollable tantrums or outburst
- Physical or verbal aggression to staff, children, or other families
- Bullying
- Repeated running from classroom or group
- One on one support that causes a supervision or safety concern for the program

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Communication

Parent Notification Methods

- Email- Families will receive registration information, newsletters, and program updates through the email address on your registration profile. Email will be used as the primary means of communication.
- Phone- In case of an emergency, Stepping Stones will contact guardians first from the number listed on your registration profile.
- Meetings- If you would like to set up a face to face meeting, please contact your child's site director.
- Facebook and Instagram- Stepping Stones utilizes social media for updates and to share pictures from the program.
- School Care Works- Stepping Stones utilizes School Care Works for registration and payment information. You can access your account through the Connect Portal at <https://connect.schoolcareworks.com/login.jsp>
- Insite App- The Insite App, run through School Care Works, allows teachers to send information and pictures to families.
- Surveys- We periodically ask for parental feedback to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the program.

Participation Opportunities

Families are encouraged to utilize our "Open Door Policy" to visit or call the center at any time, during program hours. Parent involvement creates a more positive experience for children and improves learning outcomes for children.

Open House

Families are encouraged and welcome to attend our annual Open House. The Open House is an opportunity for parents to meet staff, tour the classroom, see their children's work, and interact with other Stepping Stones families

Parent Visitors

Parents are welcome at any time to volunteer in the child's classroom. Parents can come be a "guest reader", share a special custom or experience, or give a presentation about their job.

Board of Directors

Parents, guardians, and community members are invited to serve on the Stepping Stones Children's Center Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meets monthly. If you are interested in becoming a board member, please email board@stepstonescc.org

Community Resources and Referral Services

Each program site has on hand a binder of Community Resources to address the needs of the community we serve. Your Site Director may be able to assist you in finding community resources regarding health and human services, wellness, nutrition and fitness, crisis management and preventions, and/or child development. Referral Services may include but are not limited to:

- Behavior Intervention Services
- Early Learning Intervention (DART, TEIS)
- Early Learning Resource Center
- Outreach Wellness Centers
- Advocacy Programs
- Counseling

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality of each child's records, family, medical or other personal information essential. Our policies intend to respect families and their privacy.

Confidential and sensitive information about staff, children, and families will not be shared with other families, as we strive to protect everyone's privacy. Confidential information includes, but is not limited to: names, addresses, phone numbers, disability or special needs information, and other health related information. Employees are strictly prohibited from discussing anything about another child.

Birthday Parties

Stepping Stones Children's Center recognizes that parents may wish to contact other families for social gatherings. Stepping Stones will not be able to give a family hosting the party the name or phone numbers of other families. Stepping Stones can pass out invitations or, with permission, share a parent's contact information who is throwing the party.

Photographs

No outside agency or individual will be given permission to photograph children without parental consent. During the registration process, parents will provide consent for the following:

- Child photograph to be released- Providing consent will give SSCC consent to use child photos on the SSCC website and/or social media
- Child photograph release for program site only- Providing consent will give SSCC consent to use photos in the classroom and on the School Care Works Insite App.

STAFF EMPLOYMENT BY FAMILIES

Stepping Stones Children's Center does not get a recommendation of any sort in the hiring of teachers for babysitting, nannying, mother's help, etc. If a client chooses to employ a SSCC employee, Stepping Stones Children's Center holds no liability or responsibility to this employment contract. A waiver must be signed by both parties prior to any outside employment arrangements. The outside of employment of a SSCC employee cannot conflict with their employment and/or scheduled hours at Stepping Stones.