



Berrien RESA GSRP Family Handbook



BERRIEN

R E S A



**BENTON HARBOR-ST. JOESPH YMCA
YMCA OF GREATER MICHIANA**

These materials were developed under a grant awarded by MiLEAP

Updated March 2026

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

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Berrien RESA

Great Start Readiness Program

The Great Start Readiness Program is a state-funded free preschool program for eligible four-year-olds. Your GSRP is a cooperative effort of the Berrien Regional Education Service Agency, local school districts, and other local child care/preschool providers. These programs receive funds from the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential, and every classroom is licensed by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome.....	4
Great Start Readiness Program Preschool.....	5
Enrollment Policy.....	6
Behavior Support.....	7
Inclusion Policy.....	8
Trauma-Informed & Equality-Focused Practices.....	8
Family Involvement.....	9
Food Service and Nutrition Policy.....	9
Attendance Policy.....	12
School Closings and Weather Policy.....	12
Child Release Policy.....	14
Curriculum and Assessment.....	15
Important Policies	15
Health & Safety Policies.....	16
Materials from Home.....	17
PEST Management.....	19
Parent Notification of Licensing Notebook.....	19
Staff Qualifications.....	20
Just Playing.....	21
Receipt	24

Attachments:

School Calendar

Daily GSRP Schedule

WELCOME!

Welcome to Preschool!

At the YMCA, we are dedicated to creating a nurturing and engaging environment where children can learn, grow, and have fun. Our experienced team of educators is committed to fostering a love of learning and encouraging curiosity about the world around them.

We look forward to partnering with you on your child's early learning journey!

Mission Statement:

Through the Y, we are proud to support families and children in the Greater Michiana area by providing a nurturing environment where every child feels safe, supported, and empowered to learn, grow, build friendships, and prepare for the future.

Our core values—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility—are woven into everything we do each day.

Our centers are dedicated to promoting youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a positive and enriching setting.

Great Start Readiness Program Philosophy:

We believe that young children learn best in a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment where they are surrounded by caring relationships. Strong connections between teachers, children, and families create a foundation in which everyone is valued and supported. We embrace the power of play, offering children many opportunities to explore, create, and learn through meaningful play experiences.

Our program actively involves families, working together as partners to support each child's growth and development. Learning activities are thoughtfully designed to reflect each child's current skills and interests, while also responding to the unique social, economic, cultural, and family backgrounds within our classroom community.

Guided by a child-centered approach, we draw upon the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten, our curriculum goals, assessment data, and parent feedback to ensure that each child has the best opportunity to thrive.

GREAT START READINESS PROGRAM

GREAT START READINESS PRESCHOOL

GSRP is a State funded center-based preschool program serving eligible four-year-old children. Classes are offered with a variety of family needs in mind. Many programs operate full-day, Monday through Thursday or Monday through Friday while others offer a half day program (either AM or PM) running Monday through Thursday.

GSRP regulations require staff to make two home visits, and two parent/guardian/staff conferences a year. Staff will review other program requirements during the registration process or on the first home visit. This visit typically takes place before your child's first day of school.

Parents/Families are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom, attend program events and participate in our Family Engagement/Advisory Council meetings

GREAT START READINESS PROGRAM

Benton Harbor-St. Joesph YMCA 3665 Hollywood Rd. St. Joesph, MI 49085	Monday-Friday Full Day: 8:45 AM-3:15 PM	Contact Kelly Freye Kfrey@ymcagm.org (269) 428-9622 or Michelle Maier mmaier@ymcagm.org	Age 4 by Dec. 1, 2026
	Monday-Thursday Full Day: 8:45 AM-3:15 PM		
	Monday-Thursday Half Day AM: 8:45 AM-11:45 AM		
	Monday-Thursday Half Day PM: 12:30 PM-3:30 PM		

BEFORE & AFTER SCHOOL CARE

Before & After School Care is open to GSRP and students and is held on-site.

Before Care	7:15 AM-Start of School	\$35/per week
After Care	End of School-5:00 PM	\$35/per week
Both		\$60/per week

ENROLLMENT AND WITHDRAWAL

GSRP STUDENT ENROLLMENT POLICY

ENROLLMENT OF STUDENTS WILL BE BASED ON:

- Availability of an opening in the appropriate class.
- A wait list of eligible students will be maintained, and openings filled based on eligibility factors and the order in which they were received.

TO COMPLETE ENROLLMENT, THE PARENT/GUARDIAN MUST:

- Meet all GSRP eligibility guidelines
- Submit all required enrollment forms, including:
 - Completed enrollment packet, which contains the application and emergency contact information
 - A copy of the child's birth certificate
 - A copy of the child's immunization record (or a signed waiver)
 - Well child exam

TO MAINTAIN ENROLLMENT IN THE PROGRAM, THE FAMILY MUST:

- Keep all emergency contact information up to date, including phone numbers, addresses, workplace information, and emergency contacts
- Support a safe and positive learning environment by partnering with staff and following a positive, preventative approach to discipline
- Attend and participate in scheduled home visits and parent-teacher conferences
- Ensure regular attendance and notify staff of any absences due to illness or other important reasons
- Follow through on teacher recommendations, such as scheduling follow-up appointments with medical or developmental professionals, and share results as appropriate
- Respond in a timely manner to teacher requests for information or assistance needed to support your child's learning and development

CENTER/SITE DIS-ENROLLMENT POLICY

While we strive to support every child and family, the program reserves the right to dis-enroll a student at the discretion of the Director in alignment with program policies and in the best interest of all children. Possible reasons for dis-enrollment may include:

- The program is not a suitable fit for the child's needs
- Repeated behaviors that compromise the safety or well-being of child or others (e.g., ongoing biting, physical aggression, repetitive vulgar or inappropriate language)
- Disruptive or inappropriate conduct from a parent or family member
- Excessive absences that interfere with the child's learning and participation

Every effort will be made to work with the family before dis-enrollment occurs, but the final decision rests with the Director in the best interest of the child, the staff, and the classroom environment.

WITHDRAWAL POLICY

If you plan to withdraw your child from the program, please notify the Director at least two weeks in advance of the intended withdrawal date. We also ask that you provide a forwarding address and, if applicable, the name of the new school or program your child will be attending.

FEE POLICY

The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) is provided at no cost to eligible families. There are no tuition or enrollment fees for participation in the program

BEHAVIOR SUPPORT AND PREVENTION POLICY

Our program is committed to preventing suspension and expulsion whenever possible. We implement proactive, developmentally appropriate behavior supports that focus on teaching skills rather than punishment.

When challenging behaviors occur, staff will:

- Document behaviors and strategies implemented
- Collaborate with families
- Adjust classroom supports and routines
- Consult with specialists when appropriate

If behaviors persist despite documented interventions and family collaborations, the program team will meet with the family to review strategies, consider additional supports, and determine next steps that prioritize the child's success and classroom safety.

Schedule modifications or alternative placements will only be considered after all reasonable interventions and supports have been implemented.

MINI VIKE EXPECTATIONS

- We are nice – We use kind words and actions.
- We listen – We follow directions and pay attention to others.
- We do the right thing – We make safe and respectful choices.

These simple, consistent expectations help guide children in making positive decisions and support a safe and welcoming learning environment for all.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

Children are encouraged to:

- Participate in classroom routines respectfully and cooperatively
- Follow the teacher's directions and classroom rules
- Use safe bodies and kind words with peers and staff
- Ask for help when they need support

BEHAVIORS THAT REQUIRE IMMEDIATE ATTENTION

To maintain safety and ensure a calm, respectful classroom environment, the following behaviors may result in a child being temporarily removed from the classroom and/or sent home and, if necessary, picked up early:

- Physical Harm – Hitting, biting, scratching, kicking, or any behavior that causes injury to others or oneself
- Unsafe Movement – Running from staff, leaving the classroom or playground, climbing fences, or attempting to leave the building
- Aggressive Behavior – Throwing furniture or objects, destroying materials, or acting in a way that may cause harm
- Vulgar or inappropriate language

INCLUSION POLICY

We are committed to serving children of all abilities in the least restrictive environment. Children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) are welcomed and supported through collaboration with local school districts, Early On providers, and related service professionals.

Teaching teams work closely with families and specialists to implement accommodations, modifications, and individualized goals within the goals within the classroom setting. We believe inclusive environments benefit all children by fostering empathy, understanding, and community.

BEING A KIND FRIEND AT SCHOOL

At school, we learn how to be kind, helpful, and caring friends. Sometimes, even young children might make choices that hurt others' feelings, like saying "You can't play with us," taking a toy away, or leaving someone out. These actions can make others feel sad, and that's not what kind friends do.

In GSRP, we work hard to make sure everyone feels welcome, safe, and included. Our classrooms are a place where:

- We invite others to play
- We share and take turns
- We use kind words and gentle hands
- We treat others the way we want to be treated

If a child is having a hard time being a kind friend, teachers will gently help them understand how their actions affect others and teach them better ways to solve problems and express their feelings.

HOW FAMILIES CAN HELP

Families play an important role in teaching kindness. You can help by:

- Talking with your child about being a good friend
- Encouraging sharing, turn-taking, and kind words at home
- Helping your child understand how others feel when they are left out or treated unkindly

Together, we can build a classroom where everyone feels like they belong and where kindness is always the rule.

TRAUMA-INFORMED AND EQUITY-FOCUSED PRACTICES

Our program is committed to creating a safe, predictable, and nurturing environment that supports the social-emotional well-being of every child. We recognize that children and families may experience stress, trauma, or adverse life events that impact learning and behavior.

Staff implement trauma-informed practices that emphasize:

- Building strong, trusting relationships
- Maintaining consistent routines and clear expectations
- Teaching emotional regulation and problem-solving skills
- Responding to challenging behaviors with empathy and skill-building strategies

We prioritize prevention over exclusion and work collaboratively with families and specialists to implement individualized supports when needed.

We are equally committed to culturally responsive and anti-bias practices. Classroom materials, books, and experiences reflect diverse cultures, languages, and abilities. WE partner with families to honor their values, traditions, and lived experiences within our learning community.

Our goal is to ensure every child feels safe, respected, valued, and a strong sense of belonging.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

We believe families are a child's first and most important teachers. Our program values authentic partnerships built on mutual respect, shared decision-making, and ongoing two-way communication.

Families are actively engaged in their child's learning through:

- Two home visits annually
- Two parent-teacher conferences annually
- Collaborative goal-setting based on assessment data
- Ongoing communication through classroom messaging systems, newsletters, and informal conversations
- Volunteer opportunities and participation in classroom experiences
- Family Advisory Council meetings that provide input into program planning and improvement efforts

Families are invited to share feedback through surveys and discussions that inform program decisions and continuous quality improvement initiatives. Family input is reviewed annually and considered in program planning and policy updates.

We strive to accommodate family schedules, language, and communication preferences to ensure equitable access to engagement opportunities.

FOOD SERVICE AND NUTRITION

BREAKFAST, LUNCH, AND SNACK

Mealtimes are learning experiences where children are encouraged to try new foods and engage in conversations about different foods, where they grow, or how they are made. Children are encouraged to participate in mealtime activities that may include setting the table, preparing food, serving themselves, and cleaning up. Snacks and meals in GSRP reflect the home and community and are served family style.

All children eat the same foods unless there is a doctor-documented allergy or special need for individualization. Our center complies with rule 400.8330(3) that ensures children with special dietary needs receive meals/snacks in accordance with their needs.

All children are expected to feed themselves. Staff will not demand that any child eat, but children will be encouraged to taste new foods.

Our program adheres to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)/National School Nutrition Programs nutritional guidelines, DHS Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing and the GSRP Implementation Manual. Foods served reflect the home and community cultures and are high in nutrients and low in fat, sugar, and salt.

Menus are posted inside the center and will note food substitutions if necessary.

Breakfast is generally served upon arrival: lunch is served between 11:30am – 12:30pm and an afternoon snack occurs mid-afternoon.

IS YOUR CHILD WELL ENOUGH TO COME FOR CARE?

When parents are debating whether it is okay to attend, remember that the most contagious time is just prior to the emergence of full-blown symptoms. Parents may want to keep children home for a day to ensure illness is not contagious.

It is important that children who have been ill not come to the Center if they are still sick. A low resistance jeopardizes children's health. If children are not ready to fully participate in program activities, it may be a good idea to keep them home.

If a child becomes seriously ill during the day, parents will be notified and asked to pick up their child within 30 minutes. The Center is not qualified to care for seriously ill children.

Upon arrival, if a child seems too ill to be at the Center (determined by Center Director or person in charge), parents will be asked to take him or her home. If there is a difference of opinion regarding the child's health, please understand that it is a judgment aimed only at trying to keep everyone healthy.

If there is an incidence of lice, chicken pox, or other highly contagious illnesses or infections, the Center will immediately post a notice for your information. Conversely, if your child is diagnosed with a contagious illness we ask that you inform our staff immediately.

A parent will be notified and the child sent home for these reasons:

- Fever over 100.4 degrees (ear) or 99.5 degrees (axillary)
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (3 loose stools within an hour)

Child must be symptom free WITHOUT MEDICATION for 24 hours to return.

It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to notify the teachers when their child will be absent from school. Please call your child's teacher as soon as you know your child will be absent.

A CHILD SHOULD STAY HOME IF EXPERIENCING:

1. Are feverish or have had a fever in the last 24 hours
2. Have a hacking cough or a sore throat
3. Have vomited in the last 24 hours
4. Have pink eye or symptoms which might be pink eye
5. Have been on antibiotics for strep or other contagious infections less than 24 hours
6. Have had multiple loose stools in the last 24 hours
7. Are too "out of sorts" to participate in class activities
8. Unexplained rash

*These standards apply for staff and volunteers as well



GUIDELINES FOR RETURNING TO CARE

CONDITION FOR EXCLUSION	CONDITION FOR RETURNING
Temperature greater than 100.4 degrees (ear) or 99.5 degrees (axillary)	Fever free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication)
Symptoms and signs of possible severe illness (such as unusual lethargy, uncontrolled coughing, irritability, persistent crying, difficult breathing, wheezing, or other unusual signs).	Until medical evaluation allows inclusion (doctor's written approval for return)
Abnormally loose, uncontrolled diarrhea, that is - increased number of stools, increased stool water, and/or decreased form that is not contained by the diaper	Diarrhea free for 24 hours
Vomiting	Vomit free for 24 hours and able to eat solid foods or until a health care provider determines the illness to be noncommunicable, and the child is not in danger of dehydration
Red or blue in the face, or makes high-pitched croupy or whooping sounds after coughing	Until health care provider or health official determines the condition is noninfectious.
Unusual spots or rash with fever or behavior change	Until health care provider determines that these symptoms do not indicate a communicable disease.
Purulent conjunctivitis (defined as pink or red conjunctiva with white or yellow eye discharge)	Until 24 hours after treatment has been initiated
Untreated scabies, head lice, or other infestation	After treatment and free of infestation, such as lice and nits
Known contagious diseases while still in the communicable stages	Until health care provider determines the condition is noncommunicable

ATTENDANCE

PROGRAM ATTENDANCE POLICY

Regular school attendance is important for kindergarten readiness and your child's attendance habits. If it is necessary for your child to be absent, please notify the office on the morning of the absence to explain the reason and when you expect your child to return to school. If you do not have a phone, please send a note to the teacher as soon as possible.

We must document absences to comply with regulations. If we do not hear from you, you may receive a note or phone call asking about your child's absences. Preschoolers who have an excessive number of absences may be dropped from the program to make space available for a child on the waiting list. Dis-enrollment is at the discretion of the Director.

SCHOOL CLOSING AND WEATHER

WEATHER POLICY

All GSRP classrooms will follow the building weather policy. Please send your child to school with the appropriate outdoor clothing (coats, hat, mittens, snow pants, boots, etc.) Your child will be going outside in light rain, snow, sleet, and wind, so please plan accordingly.

The State of Michigan "Department of Human Services" states that:

- *Playing outdoors in cold weather does not cause illness in children. Colds, flu and illness are caused by viruses and bacteria. Children confined in warm, stuffy rooms with several other children have greater exposure to germs causing sickness.*
- *Frequent exposure to fresh air, exercise, and sunshine increases a child's general fitness and resistance to infections.*
- *During active play outdoors, the viruses and bacteria are dispersed into a larger, more mobile air space decreasing the risk of spreading to others.*
- *Physical activity increases the air exchange in children's lungs and improves blood flow through the body, giving germs shorter contact with respiratory surfaces.*

SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND DELAYS

In the case of inclement weather or unforeseen circumstances that cause a school delay or closing, families will receive an alert via text through their designated classroom app and will also be posted on social media. **Northside Child Development Center will follow Niles Community Schools for inclement weather closings.**

In the case of a two-hour delay class times are as follows:

AM GSRP – closed

Full Day GSRP – 10:20am–3:20pm

***Buses will also run on a two-hour delay**

Pre-care is NOT offered during 2-hour delay

SAFE ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Upon arrival at the Center, the following guidelines will be followed:

- Children must be signed-in by staff upon arrival.
- Children must be escorted by the parent/guardian into the Center or to the designated classroom meeting area.

Note: Please do not allow your child to enter the Center while eating any food.

Upon departure at the Center, the following guidelines will be followed:

- Parents/guardians picking up children will be signed out by a staff member.
- Older siblings may pick up younger siblings, but they must be at least 18 years of age.
- Children will be released only to those persons listed on the Child Information Record as authorized to be picked up by the parent/guardian. If you are picking your child up, please be prepared to show ID.
- If the parent/guardian wants to change the pick-up person over the phone, the new person must show proof of identification. The parent/guardian must sign a written permission for the new person at the first available time.
- **If a parent/guardian or person authorized to pick up a child is intoxicated OR substance-impaired when they come to the Center, staff will offer to call another person to transport them. If the person insists on leaving with the child, they will be informed that the police will be notified about an intoxicated or substance-impaired driver leaving our premises. Additionally, Child Protective Services will be called.**
- If the pickup person does not have a proper car seat in their vehicle, staff are legally obligated to hold the child at the Center.

Late Pick-up or Early Drop-off: When a parent/guardian or other designated adult is picking up or dropping off a child from school, it is important that they be on time. Teachers and other school personnel have other responsibilities before and after programming and cannot be available to ensure your child's safety.

CHILD RELEASE POLICY

Because of our concern for the safety of our students, these guidelines will be followed.

- No child will be released to a person other than a parent or guardian during school hours without the prior permission of the parent or guardian as provided on the Emergency Contact information.
- If a parent/guardian desires that his/her child be released to another person not indicated on the Emergency Contact information, the following must be received in WRITING: 1) the name of the person to whom the child is to be released; 2) the time of the release and the length of time for which the child is to be released; 3) the purpose of the release.
- Exceptions will be made only in times of emergency. The Program Director or Designee will make the determination of whether an emergency exists.
- The person to whom the child is to be released will be required to sign a log indicating the time and purpose of the release. If the person is not known/recognized by the staff person, photo identification will be required. If the Director or designee has any doubts about the documentation presented, a decision not to release will be made.
- No preschool child will be permitted to walk home alone. The parent/guardian, or authorized adult, must pick up the child at school.
- With regards to divorced or separated parents:
 - A birth parent without custody may have access to his/her child or have the child released to him/her with proper documentation.
 - Where applicable, parents with custody should inform the school of custody arrangements and, if necessary, provide a court order (restraining order), which will be kept on file in the School Office. Without this court order, the school cannot legally prevent the non-custodial birth parent from taking the child from school.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

GSRP classrooms offer a safe, nurturing, and engaging environment where children grow, learn, and thrive. Our curriculum is intentionally designed to support each child's individual needs through a play-based, developmentally appropriate approach that emphasizes social-emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development.

All learning experiences are aligned with the Michigan Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Pre-Kindergarten. Children participate in large group, small group, and individualized learning experiences. Classroom environments are intentionally structured to promote early literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, creative arts, and social-emotional development.

We utilize Creative Curriculum and Montessori instructional approaches, both aligned with state standards and research-based best practices.

Teachers regularly assess and monitor each child's progress using ongoing observation, authentic assessment tools, and developmental screener. Assessment data is used intentionally to:

- Individualize instruction
- Guide small group planning
- Inform classroom environment adjustments
- Differentiate learning experiences
- Develop child-specific learning goals

Teaching teams meet regularly to review child outcome data and use this information to inform curriculum planning and continuous classroom improvement.

Families are active partners in this process. Assessment results are shared during conferences and home visits to collaboratively establish goals that support learning both at school and at home.

Program-wide child outcome data is reviewed multiple times annually to identify trends in literacy, math, and social-emotional growth. Findings inform professional development priorities and classroom action plans as part of our continuous quality improvement process.

IMPORTANT POLICIES

REFERRALS

We believe that home and school together form a positive support system for the growing child. Parents are always kept informed of their child's progress. If a referral is needed for additional support, the family will be involved in contacting their local school district and creating a plan, and setting specific goals for the child. Families will be informed at any point that the child is receiving one-on-one support services, and classroom teachers will partner with support staff to create an inclusive and supportive environment.

Each site has a Great Start Resource Directory, which provides information and contacts for numerous Berrien County programs that support families with young children. GSRP teaching staff are available to assist parents in contacting needed resources and obtaining any needed documentation.

INCLUSION

At the YMCA, we understand that each family and child have unique needs, and we strive to accommodate and support them in every way possible. We offer a range of services and resources to ensure that families and children feel welcome, safe, and supported in our programs. This includes providing access to specialized equipment and materials and collaborating with families to create individualized plans for their child's learning and development when needed. Our dedicated team of educators and staff work closely with families to ensure that every child has the best possible experience in our programs.

GRIEVANCES

Our program strives to provide a positive environment for all. However, at times, a concern may arise. If you have any questions or concerns you cannot resolve with the teacher directly, please bring the concerns to the attention of the Director, who will work through the concerns with you.

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICIES

INJURIES AND ACCIDENTS

Parents **MUST** inform the program staff of any health or safety needs of the child that the program may be required to address. If your child has had an injury or illness that may prevent activity, please call the center.

If your child is injured while in our care, parents/guardians will be notified by either a note home, phone call, or through classroom messenger. If the injury is not serious, the staff will report the incident to the parents/guardians when the child is picked up at the end of the day. In case of serious injury, parents/guardians will be notified immediately by phone.

Program staff are trained in First Aid and CPR and will secure medical and/or emergency treatment for your child in possible emergency situations.

MAJOR INJURIES include: a head injury, a broken bone, severe lacerations, or any other injury that requires a doctor's visit.

MINOR INJURIES include scratches, bruises, and bumps

If an accident occurs resulting in the injury of a child, staff will complete an incident report. This report will include the name of the child, date of the incident, witnesses, and medical professionals consulted, if applicable. If other children are involved in the incident, they shall not be identified by name in the report. This report will be given to the director to be kept in the center files.

INCIDENTS

An incident includes the following: a child is lost or left unsupervised, alleged sexual contact between children or a child and a staff member or volunteer or physical discipline of a child by a staff member or volunteer. In the event this occurs, the following will take place:

- Parents will be notified immediately by phone or personal contact
- If deemed appropriate the local authorities will be notified
- LARA agency will be notified using the appropriate reporting form BCAL 4605

HEALTH DOCUMENTS

All students must have a copy of their updated immunization record in their center file before their first day of attendance. If a parent chooses not to have his/her child immunized, an immunization waiver may be obtained through the local health department.

A well-child exam must be submitted within the first 30 days of school for continued enrollment. If a well-child exam is not on file by the required date, your child will be dis-enrolled and placed on a waitlist.

MEDICATION POLICY

Medication will be administered to students during the school day only under the following conditions:

- The medication must be in its original container
- The medication must be prescribed by a physician
- The label must include the student's name, date, prescribing doctor's name, dosage, medication name, and complete administration instructions.

A Medication Authorization Form must also be completed and signed by both the parent/guardian and the prescribing physician. This form is available in the school office and must be submitted before any medication can be administered.

A topical ointment form must be filled out for all creams, lotions, and sprays. This form can be picked up from the center director or the building office.

HAND WASHING

Hand washing is probably the most critical element in reducing the spread of germs. Children should learn about hand washing early in life to help them develop healthy habits. Children will be required to wash their hands before eating, after using the restroom, when returning from outdoors, and other times as determined necessary by the staff. We ask that you encourage and reinforce this behavior to keep everyone as healthy as possible. Staff also follow this policy and wash their hands before any food preparation.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

GSRP guidelines require children to be engaged in a minimum of thirty minutes of outdoor play where they can be active and physical. This includes but is not limited to running, jumping, climbing, etc. The outdoor environment is an extension of the classroom and provides students with many opportunities to explore and continue to build social skills. Research states, "Good Physical health and well-being, and a safe environment, contribute to improved learning. Gross motor development enhances body awareness, understanding of spatial relationships, and cognitive growth." [Michigan Department of Education]

MATERIALS FROM HOME

APPROPRIATE CLOTHING FOR PRESCHOOL

Preschool is a place for active play and hands-on learning. Please dress your child in comfortable, washable clothing that allows them to participate in all activities without worry. Clothing will likely come into contact with paint, sand, markers, and other messy materials.

We recommend tennis shoes for safety and comfort. Please label all of your child's belongings with their name—many children have similar items, and unlabeled clothing is often impossible to identify. We cannot be responsible for lost items that are not labeled.

Outdoor play is part of our daily routine, except during heavy rain or extreme cold. Dress your child for the weather. Once winter begins, warm mittens, coats, hats, boots, and snow pants are needed every day.

Each child should bring a large bag or backpack daily to carry home artwork, papers, and teacher notes. Accidents can happen, so please keep an extra set of clothing at school. Our supply of extra clothing is limited; if your child borrows an item from the classroom, please wash and return it promptly.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

All staff are mandated by law to report any suspected case of child abuse, neglect, child sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation to the Department of Human Services or immediately over the telephone at 855-444-3911, and they should also follow up the report in writing within 72 hours. Reporting forms are available online at <http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs>. Form number DHS-3200. Any reasonable suspicion will be reported, including a child telling a staff member about abuse, witnessing the abuse, a parent's statement of abuse, or any physical or behavioral signs of abuse. A copy of this law may be obtained from the program director.

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

The YMCA of Greater Michiana does not discriminate based on age, sex, race, disability, color, religion, or national origin. No one will be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefit of, or be subject to discrimination during any program or activity or in employment.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Child and family records will not be disclosed without the written consent of the parent or legal guardian, except as needed when child abuse and neglect are a concern. Confidential information is shared only with staff members who need the information to perform their jobs. Families have the right to examine their records.

DRUG FREE AND SMOKE FREE ZONE

Our facilities and grounds are drug-free and smoke-free zones. Please extinguish cigarettes and properly discard smoking products prior to entering the parking lot and building. This includes chewing tobacco and vapes. Help us stay a drug-free and smoke-free zone by informing anyone who will be escorting your child to and from school of our policy.

CELL PHONE USE

To maintain a calm, focused, and respectful learning environment for our children and staff, we kindly ask that you limit cell phone use while in the building. Conversations can be disruptive to classroom activities or children who may be resting. For this reason, we also ask that parents not enter the building or drop off their child while actively talking on the phone. This time is important for connecting with your child and for helping them transition smoothly into the day. If you need to take a call, please do so outside or in the front lobby next to the main doors. Thank you for helping us keep our center peaceful and distraction-free.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

A comprehensive background check is required to be completed in the Michigan Childcare Background Check System (CCBC) on all licensee/licensee designees, program directors, childcare staff, and volunteer staff with unsupervised access to children. Supervised volunteers are required to have a public sex offender registry (PSOR) clearance with results located at the facility. All staff and volunteers are also required to sign abuse and neglect statements.

- **Unsupervised Volunteers**—Will be required to complete a TB test if volunteering more than 4 hours over a 2-week period and be responsible for additional training. Unsupervised volunteers shall provide appropriate care and supervision of children at all times and act in a manner that is conducive to the welfare of children.
- **Supervised Volunteers** will not have a comprehensive background check and will always be under the supervision of the childcare staff. Supervised volunteers must always be in the line of sight and sound of staff and shall provide appropriate care and supervision of children at all times and act in a manner that is conducive to the welfare of children

PEST MANAGEMENT

As required by State Licensing, each program has an integrated pest management program and parents will be notified prior to the pesticide applications.

YMCA OF GREATER MICHIANA NOTICE OF PESTICIDE USE

Pesticides are periodically applied to school district property or center as part of the pest management program. Please be advised that parents or guardians of children attending the school or day care center are entitled to receive the advance notice of a pesticide application, other than a bait or gel formulation, by first class United States mail postmarked at least 3 days before the pesticide application, if they so request. If you prefer to receive notification by first class mail, please obtain a form from your building director.

General notifications will include

- A posting will be displayed at the entry point on the facility with at least a 48-hour notification.
- Hand delivered notification through the child's backpack.

Please understand that emergencies do arise and that pesticides may be applied without prior notice to parents or legal guardians. Parents or legal guardians that have requested prior notification, however, will be notified after pesticide application.

Application of pesticides will be performed only by certified or registered applicators where and when required. If a pesticide is applied in a building, students will not occupy the room for at least four hours. Forty-eight hours prior to the time of application notification will be posted near the building's primary point of entry and in a common area of the building. When a pesticide is applied to school district grounds, the application will not be made within 100 feet of occupied classrooms, and flags will be inserted in the ground to mark the application area.

This notice was given in compliance with Regulation 637, as amended by Public Act 131 of 1993.

PARENT NOTIFICATIONS

LICENSING REPORTS

The center keeps a licensing notebook containing a summary sheet, all licensing inspections and special investigations, and related corrective action plans for the last 5 years. The licensing notebook is available to parents/guardians during regular business hours. Reports from at least the past three years are available at www.michigan.gov/michildcare.

OR

The center does not keep a licensing notebook, but internet is available onsite. Reports from at least the last three years are available at www.michigan.gov/michildcare.

SAFETY DRILLS

Our programs are required to practice safety drills several times a year for fire evacuation, tornado safety and lockdown drills in accordance with Michigan Child Care Licensing Rules. If our school is evacuated, staff will notify you or another adult on your child's emergency contact form.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Our program participates in ongoing self-reflection and quality improvement planning through Great Start to Quality. We review classroom practices, family feedback, child outcome data, and staff professional development goals annually to identify strengths and areas of growth.

Teaching staff participate in reflective coaching cycles with Early Childhood Specialists that include observation, feedback, goal-setting, and follow-up.

Action plans are developed with measurable goals to ensure continuous improvement in instructional practices, family engagement, and child outcomes.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

CLASSROOM STAFF

The staff of the GSRP is committed to providing a high-quality program for young children and their families. Classroom teachers hold a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child development with a specialization in preschool teaching or a valid Michigan teaching certificate and an Early Childhood Education (ZA) or Early Childhood-General and Special Education (ZS) endorsement, or a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood or Child Development with a specialization in preschool teaching. Most classrooms will have one teacher and at least one assistant teacher to ensure a staff ratio of one adult to eight children. The classroom associate teacher holds a Child Development Credential (CDA) or an associate's degree in Child Development. In classrooms that have three adults, the third adult meets the Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing, Department of Human Services licensing requirements as a "caregiver."

GSRP SUPPORT STAFF THROUGH BERRIEN RESA

Each Berrien GSRP program has the advantage of working with expert staff from the Berrien Regional Education Service Agency, as well as local district personnel. An Early Childhood Specialist is assigned to each classroom to provide classroom support through regular classroom visits, as well as professional development for the GSRP staff. The Early Childhood Specialist has a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education and extensive experience in early childhood programs.

JUST PLAYING

When I'm building in the block area,

For you see, I'm learning as I play,
About balances and shapes.
Who knows, I may be an architect
someday.

When I'm getting all dressed up,
Setting the table, caring for the babies,
Don't get the idea I'm "just playing."
For you see, I'm learning as I play;
I may be a mother or father someday.

When you see me up to my elbows in
paint or standing at an easel, or molding
and shaping clay, please don't let me
hear you say, "He is just playing."
For you see, I'm learning as I play.
I'm expressing myself and being
creative. I may be an artist or an
inventor someday.

When you see me sitting in a chair
"Reading" to an imaginary audience,
Please don't laugh and think I'm "just
playing." For you see, I'm learning as I
play. I may be a teacher someday.

When you see me combing the bushes
for bugs, or packing my pockets with
choice things I find, don't pass it off as
"just play." For you see, I'm learning as I
play. I may be a scientist someday.

Please don't say I'm "just playing."

When you see me engrossed in a puzzle
Or some "plaything" at my school,
Please don't feel the time is wasted in
"play." For you see I'm learning as I play.
I'm learning to solve problems and
concentrate. I may be in business
someday.

When you see me cooking or tasting
foods,
Please don't think that because I enjoy
it, it is "just play." I'm learning to follow
directions and see differences.
I may be a cook someday.

When you see me learning to skip, hop,
Run and move my body,
Please don't say I'm "just playing."
For you see, I'm learning as I play.
I'm learning how my body works.
I may be a doctor, nurse or athlete
someday.

When you ask me what I've done at
school today, and I say, "I just played,"
Please don't misunderstand me.
For you see, I'm learning as I play.
I'm learning to enjoy and be successful in
my work. I'm preparing for tomorrow.
Today, I am a child and my work is play.

-Anita Wadley

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The process of connecting families to community resources involves assessing the family's needs, identifying appropriate resources, providing referrals to those resources, and following up with the family to ensure that their needs have been met. This process may vary depending on the specific community resources and the needs of the family, but in general, it involves a collaborative effort between our program and families to ensure that referrals are made in a respectful, helpful, and safe manner. Resource books are also available in the main Northside office and main entrance.

If you or your family needs extra resources or support, please contact Michelle Skalla or Kristin McKay-Parrish at 683-1982.



berriencountyParentNET.org helps connect parents to the resources in Berrien County that are available to families – whether it be healthcare, schools, fun activities or parenting support. The development of this website has been made possible through a grant given to Berrien County to promote positive parenting through county wide implementation of Triple P (Positive Parenting Program).

Triple P is a program that supports parents by offering simple, practical parenting strategies for a wide range of parenting concerns. TRIPLE P (Positive Parenting Program) can help! Triple P is a program that suggests simple routines and small changes that can make a big difference for families. Every family is different. Yet parents all over the world face problems that are surprisingly similar. The issues you deal with in your home affect families everywhere.

Triple P Positive Parenting helps parents to:

- Create a stable and harmonious family environment
- Encourage behavior they like
- Build positive relationships with their children
- Deal positively, consistently and decisively with problem behavior

Read more at berriencountyParentNET.org

ABUSE OR MISTREATMENT

Our organization's top priority is keeping individuals safe. Any form of abuse or mistreatment of all individuals, children, employees, and volunteers is prohibited. Individuals shall not abuse or mistreat employees, volunteers, or other consumer in any way. Use of abusive language, obscene or profane language, including racial, religious or sexual references directed at other people will not be tolerated. It is important to treat others as you would like to be treated.

REPORTING

Because our organization is dedicated to maintaining zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that everyone, including you actively participates in the protection of all our individuals. In the event that someone observes any suspicious or inappropriate behaviors and/or policy violations on the part of other employees, volunteers, or others, it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations. Remember, at our organization, the policies apply to everyone.

Our Code of Conduct and policies include:

- appropriate and inappropriate displays of physical affection.
- appropriate and inappropriate verbal communication.
- one-on-one interactions and outside contact between employees/volunteers and individuals
- electronic communication between employees/volunteers and individuals.
- gift giving and receiving between individuals and employees/volunteers.
- appropriate and inappropriate individual-to-individual interactions.
- The process for individuals to report concerns, complaints or grievances back to the organization.

How to Report Abuse

You do not need proof that abuse is occurring to make a report, only reasonable suspicion. Reporting child sexual abuse is key in preventing and intervening in abuse. Call Children's Protective Services at (855) 444-3911 for Michigan and (800) 800-5556 for Indiana, or you can contact the YMCA of Greater Michiana by scanning the QR Code.





FAMILY HANDBOOK RECEIVED

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the YMCA of Greater Michiana’s Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) Handbook. I have reviewed its contents and agree to abide by the policies and procedures outlined within. I am also aware that the licensing notebook is available for review during regular business hours, and that inspection reports can be accessed online at www.michigan.gov/michildcare.

PARENT NOTIFICATION OF THE LICENSING NOTEBOOK Childcare Organizations Act, 1973 Public Act 116 Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Child Care Licensing Bureau

The center keeps a licensing notebook containing a summary sheet, all licensing inspections and special investigations, and related corrective action plans for the last 5 years. The licensing notebook is available to parents/guardians during regular business hours. Reports from at least the past three years are available at www.michigan.gov/michildcare.

The center does not keep a licensing notebook, but internet is available onsite. Reports from at least the last three years are available at www.michigan.gov/michildcare.

I have read the above statement issued by The YMCA of Greater Michiana

Child(ren)’s Name(s):	
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Parent Name _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

LARA is an equal opportunity employer/program.