

NMSBVI PRESCHOOL HANDBOOK

NMSBVI VISION STATEMENT

As a leader and unifying entity in the field of educating students birth-high school who are blind or visually impaired, NMSBVI is a statewide network of services that ensures all students who are blind or visually impaired will become independent productive members of their communities by identifying and providing quality education and collaborating with students, families and partners to provide outstanding training, resources and support services.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- All children can learn and we value their individual talents.
- Independence is the right and ultimate goal of every student who is blind or visually impaired.
- NMSBVI is the leader in the field of educating students who are blind or visually impaired.
- NMSBVI supports the education of all students with blindness and visual impairment in the state.
- Parents and students who are blind or visually impaired need to be provided current information about all aspects of the education of their children.
- Education begins with families and continues throughout the lives of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- Education of individuals who are blind or visually impaired encompasses not only academic skills, but also specialized skills of blindness and visual impairment including compensatory or functional academic skills, including communication modes, orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, use of assistive technology, sensory efficiency skills, and self-determination
- Children who are blind or visually impaired should have the ability and the choice to be integrated into their communities.
- We believe that all children learn best when provided with the appropriate level of specialized instruction and the appropriate educational environment.
- The most effective way to teach is through collaboration with one another and other partners.
- We hold ourselves accountable for excellence in preparing students to lead independent lives.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

NMSBVI's community of **staff, students, and families** work as a team.

We share the responsibility of modeling and teaching the essential academic and life skills necessary to encourage our students to become responsible, contributing members of society.

We strive to cultivate each student's strengths and to encourage his or her own positive skills and attributes.

Our staff believes that children are unique individuals and by building upon each child's strengths and abilities, all children can be successful learners. We believe that children learn in an engaging, safe, and consistent environment supported by a trained, caring, and responsive staff. Children need a variety of experiences that include daily opportunities to participate in small and large group activities which encourage math, language, thinking skills, social, and muscle development. We believe that children learn best when they have opportunities to explore their world with adults encouraging and guiding their growth and development. Our goal is to create a home/school partnership where parents and teachers work together to support children's learning.

NMSBVI Preschool and Kindergarten Information

School Hours

School begins at 9:00 and ends at 2:30 on Mondays, Tuesday, Thursdays and Fridays. Kindergarten students also attend school on Wednesdays from 9:00 to 12:00.

Children are not to be dropped off earlier than 9:00 am and must be riding the bus home or picked up by family at 2:30 pm.

Children riding the bus will return to the school if they are not met by a parent or if the bus is unable to reach emergency contacts for drop-off.

Those children not picked up by parents after the preschool session will be supervised in the office. If no one comes to pick up the child, appropriate authorities may be contacted.

Snow Days and Weather

The preschool follows APS school closures and delays during times of inclement weather. Whenever all APS schools declare a snow closure day or snow delay,

NMSBVI will be closed or on a delay. If there is a snow delay on a Wednesday, the half day NMSBVI kindergarten program will be canceled for that day. Watch the local news or listen to KKOB radio for current school delay/closing information.

Attendance Policy

All absences must be reported to the school office before the beginning of each day. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each day and the parents of children with unexcused absence are called. Please call the office to inform staff of absences, tardiness, and changes with your child.

Transportation Policy

APS Transportation: 880-3989

Rio Rancho Transportation: 338-0078

Bernalillo Transportation: 867-3207

If your child rides the school bus, School District transportation forms must be completed and returned to the school office before a child is permitted to receive transportation services. Check with your child's specific school district for this information. Please understand the following guidelines:

- Parents should accompany their child to the bus before school and meet the bus following the school day. Children not met by a parent will have to wait while secondary contact persons are reached.
- Parents must contact their bus driver to inform them if their child will not be riding the bus in the morning, so that other students can be picked up in a timely manner.

The transportation personnel are performing a service that the local school district provides; they are not employed by NMSBVI. Please contact the bus company directly if you have any questions or concerns about the buses.

Parent Visitation to Campus

- All visitors must report to the reception area when visiting the preschool. NM State regulations require that visitors sign in and state the purpose of the visit in each preschool classroom. Parents and interested adults are welcome and encouraged to visit the school. Visitors should make arrangements in advance by calling the office or contacting the teacher.

- Each class is equipped with an observation room that allows parents to view the class without interrupting the educational process. Please be prepared to use this room for extended visitations.
- Any request for a family and child (who is not enrolled in our school) to visit classes must be approved in advance by the program coordinator.
- In the interest of safety, children will be released to custodial parent/parents and legal guardians, or to persons listed by the parent or guardians on the Emergency Card ONLY. Teachers, paraprofessionals, or drivers will request a picture ID if someone they do not know comes to pick up the child or meet the bus. Restraining orders and custody papers must be on file in the school office. Special pick up requests may be made in writing by parents on a daily basis.

Supplies

- Backpack—large enough to hold a folder
- Change of clothes—please include underpants and socks to be kept at school

Please mark your child's name on all personal items.

Bathroom Routines

Your child does not need to be potty trained prior to attending the Preschool Program. We work on all areas of development including self-help skills. If your child is not potty trained, you need to provide diapers and wipes. Please mark the packages with your child's name.

When diaper changing, universal precautions are followed. Disposable gloves are required when changing diapers. After each use, all surfaces of the changing table and potty seats are disinfected. If your child is allergic to latex gloves, please notify the Preschool staff and indicate this on your child's blue information card.

Parent and Staff Communication

Communication between teachers and parents is encouraged. It is best to contact teachers before school or after school hours. Phone calls will not be transferred to classrooms during school hours. A message can be relayed to the classroom teacher when necessary. Communications can occur in the daily notebook as well.

Daily Notebook: These notebooks were created to provide a link between home and school. An exchange of information between home and school is important for a number of reasons: informing you of classroom activities and upcoming events, informing you of changes in your child on a daily basis, providing you with opportunities to talk about past or upcoming events with your child, and sharing insight into newly developing skills, needs and behaviors. In order to best serve your child, please read these daily and write back to staff so that we can both be informed about any changes that may have occurred with your child. We have found that a team approach between home and school is an effective way to promote a young child's development.

Parent Conferences: Formal parent conferences will be scheduled a minimum of twice a year. Parents may request additional conferences in advance at any time throughout the school year.

Home visits: Your child's teacher may visit with your family at the start of the school year. You will be called in advance to set up a time convenient for you.

Individual Education Plans: An Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be developed for all children identified for special education services in accordance with Federal law.

We will involve parents in the IEP process, as we feel that the parents are vital in creating a successful and useful plan for their children.

PLEASE NOTIFY THE SCHOOL IF:

- Your child will be absent
- Your address or phone number (home and work) changes.
- There is any change in the authorized person picking up your child.
- There are significant changes at home.
- Your child has a prolonged illness or will be away from school for an extended length of time.

Please check your child's backpack each day for important notices.

Student Wellness

(Eyes, Audiology, Shots, Physical) & what to do when your child is sick:

Immunizations

New Mexico law requires that all students be immunized against certain communicable diseases. All students **MUST** provide the school with a current copy of their immunizations (or an exemption form) every year.

Physical Exam and Eye Report

A physical exam is **required** on a yearly basis and must be returned to the school on or before the start of the school year. All students (incoming and returning) are **required** to have an *annual eye exam* with a copy on file at NMSBVI. ***It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure the school receives these documents.***

Illness

Our goal is to provide a healthy environment for children. To achieve this goal, cooperation is needed by schools, childcare providers and parents. Children are not only uncomfortable when sick, but may be contagious to staff and other children until treated. If a child becomes ill at school, parents will be notified and asked to pick up their child **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**. In cases where the child returns to school and does not seem to be fully recovered, parents will be contacted and asked to take their child home.

Health Guidelines

NMSBVI's student population includes students who are medically fragile. In order to achieve the goal of minimizing the spread of colds/infections at school, the following criteria should be considered reasons to keep your child home from school *or* reasons for us to send your child home.

- Acute phase of cold/upper respiratory infection (cough, nasal drainage, tired, sleepy, fussiness, unwilling to participate in classroom activities etc...)
- Temperature at or above 100.0 degrees
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea- three or more times during the school session or once if accompanied by other symptoms of illness.
- Suspicious unexplained rashes that appear to be spreading (must be evaluated by a physician prior to returning to school)
- Conjunctivitis or "pink eye" (must be evaluated by a physician prior to returning to school)
- Pediculosis (lice) or similar diseases

- Infected skin with sores/lesions, crusts and/or drainage (must be evaluated by a physician prior to returning to school)
- Any child who requires medication for a fever (Tylenol or Motrin) the day before or the morning of school, should be kept home

If antibiotic therapy is needed, the student should remain *home* for the *first 24 hours after antibiotics has begun*. Also, if your child has a temperature, diarrhea or is vomiting, he/she can *return to school* once they are **symptom free for 24 hours** (without the help of fever reducing medication) and are able to participate in classroom activities.

Reporting of Communicable Diseases

Management of common communicable diseases shall be in accordance with New Mexico Department of Health guidelines and/or New Mexico School Health Manual. A student who exhibits symptoms of a readily transmissible communicable disease may be temporarily excluded from school attendance. If your child has been diagnosed with a communicable illness including **measles, mumps, meningitis, diphtheria, rubella, salmonella, tuberculosis, varicella (chicken pox), head lice or any other contagious illness; the caregiver should notify the school immediately**. If recommended by the New Mexico Department of Health, parents of other children attending the school may be notified that their child has been exposed to a communicable disease without identifying the particular student who has the disease. A diagnosed child must be excluded from the program for the period of time prescribed by the child's physician or by local public health office. The District reserves the right to require a physician's statement authorizing the student's return to school. All medical information will be held in strict confidence. Only those persons with direct responsibility for the care of the student shall be informed of this information if it is determined there is a *need* for such individuals to know this information.

When a child is out of school due to an illness or a doctor's appointment the preschool teacher and/or school should be notified on a daily basis. If their absence is due to a prolonged illness a physician's statement authorizing the child's return is expected.

Prescription Medications

State regulations governing the administration of prescription medication in the schools require that the school have both the physician's authorization and the parent's permission for the school to administer the medication. The medication

must be in a labeled bottle from a pharmacy with the child's name, name of the medication, dosage to be given, and the number of doses and time of day to be given. Usually it is possible to arrange dosage times so that it is not necessary to administer the medication during school hours. Medications will be administered by the school nurse. Medication permission forms may be obtained from the school secretary or nurse. It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure their child's pediatrician completes this form AND that the school receives the form. No medication will be administered without the completed forms on file.

Over the Counter Medications

An over-the-counter medication form must be completed and on file prior to the use or application of sun block, diaper ointment, Tylenol, Motrin, etc. It is the responsibility of the parents to provide the school nurse with the needed medication.

Specialized Health Services

If your child requires a special procedure such as G-tube feedings/hydration, suctioning, tracheotomy care, or oxygen administration, the school must have physician's authorization and parent's permission before such procedures can be implemented. Specialized Health Service forms can be obtained from the school secretary or nurse. It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure their child's pediatrician completes this form AND that the school receives the form. The specialized procedure cannot be performed without the completed forms on file and the necessary supplies on hand.

Oral Feedings

The school provides free snack and lunch for all students. If your child has any food allergies or special diets, please notify the school nurse. Also, if your child has a history of reflux, aspiration, delayed swallow, poor saliva management, choking, abnormal gag reflex, coughing or any other difficulties while eating, the school must have permission from your child's pediatrician prior to the initiation of any oral feedings. The form may be obtained from the school secretary or nurse.

Food Allergies, Asthma, and Seizures

If your child has a history of food allergies, asthma or seizures please obtain the appropriate form from the school nurse or secretary and have your child's pediatrician fill it out. This will be a written plan for the nurses and/or staff to

follow in the event your child experiences an allergic reaction, asthma exacerbation, or seizure while at school.

Mandatory Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting

Pursuant to Section 32A-4-3, NMSA 1978 (as amended 2005), any NMSBVI staff member knowing or having reasonable suspicion that a child/adolescent/dependent adult is abused or neglected will report the matter immediately to:

1. A local law enforcement agency;
2. State of New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department/Adult Protective Services Central Intake at 1-800-797-3260;
3. Tribal Law Enforcement or social services agencies for an Indian child/adolescent/dependent adult residing in Indian country.
4. Complete appropriate NMSBVI Abuse/Neglect form.

Dress Code

Parents should dress their children in comfortable, **washable play clothing**, which they can reasonably manage. Appropriate dress for the changing weather is critical, since outdoor activities are part of the daily program. In case of excessively hot weather, staff will make sure children drink enough water to stay hydrated. Sunscreen will be applied (with parent permission) and adequate shade will be provided. Parents should mark all clothing with their child's full name. Children should have shoes with closed toes for playground use.

Field Trips

Field trips enable teachers to expand children's learning beyond the walls of the classroom into the vast community outside. They provide children with experiences that cannot be duplicated in the school but are nonetheless an integral part of school instruction.

Research has shown that field trips are important for many reasons:

- they increase student knowledge and understanding of a subject,
- they add realism to the topic of study, and
- they provide an opportunity to develop and enhance a student's socialization skills.

At NMSBVI, field trips provide an excellent opportunity for teachers to observe how a child is using their vision in familiar and unfamiliar environments such as: observing visual discrimination, fixating and tracking, shift of gaze between

objects, scanning of the environment, and visual acuity for viewing objects near and far.

Personal Items:

We ask students to be thoughtful of others both inside and outside the school buildings. **Items that might disrupt class or cause injuries should be left at home.** These include but are not limited to such things as laser pointers, toys, games, tape recorders, radios, cameras, yo-yos, etc. They cause unnecessary problems. Nuisance items, which create disruptions or get in the way of learning, may be confiscated. The principal will only return confiscated items to a parent or guardian. Schools are not responsible for loss or damage to any items.

School Curriculum:

Our curriculum is theme based with an emphasis on multi-sensory teaching methods and language rich activities. The use of themes provides the children with practice and application for the skills in meaningful contexts. Themes relate directly to children's real-life experiences and will build on what they know. The same content will be offered more than once and incorporated into different kinds of activities. Several subject areas can be integrated in the program. The multi-sensory approach provides activities for all learning styles.

Young children feel secure with routines and schedules. The routines and schedules help them learn sequencing and time related activities. This schedule will vary due to weather, school field trips, and special events.

Expanded Core Curriculum

The Expanded Core Curriculum for students with Visual Impairment is a national initiative intended to teach additional life skills necessary to help insure maximal independence for children and adults with visual impairments and blindness. At the preschool level, many of the activities and lessons look playful and fun. Our philosophy is that learning should be exciting and engaging, not necessarily "work." We realize that children with visual impairments may not learn all that they need to know through their own experiences and observations or from the general school core curriculum. Because of that, the Expanded Core Curriculum is an area of focus for all our students. This curriculum includes:

Compensatory Skills, Including Communication Modes

Compensatory and functional skills include such learning experiences as concept

development, spatial understanding, study and organizational skills, speaking and listening skills, and adaptations necessary for accessing all areas of the existing core curriculum. Communication needs will vary, depending on degree of functional vision, effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be done. Children may use Braille, large print, print with the use of optical devices, regular print, tactile symbols, a calendar system, sign language, and/or recorded materials to communicate. These are the kinds of skills or strategies that our children need to learn in order to access the same learning opportunities that their sighted peers are able to access. It includes lessons on developing concepts or ideas about their world through hands on experiences and learning to communicate.

Social Interaction Skills

Almost all social skills used by sighted children and adults have been learned by watching other people. They see how to behave in socially appropriate ways. Social interaction skills may not be learned through such observations by blind and visually impaired individuals. Instead, social skills must be carefully, thoughtfully, and sequentially taught to them. Instruction in social interaction skills becomes a part of the expanded core curriculum as a need so fundamental that it can often mean the difference between social isolation and a satisfying and fulfilling life as an adult.

Recreation and Leisure Skills

Our students need to develop activities in recreation and leisure that they can enjoy throughout their lives. Most often sighted persons select their recreation and leisure activity preferences by visually observing activities and choosing those in which they wish to participate, however our children need to be given experiences. The teaching of recreation and leisure skills to blind and visually impaired students must be planned and deliberately taught, and should focus on the development of life-long skills. At the preschool level, this may begin with fieldtrips to the bowling alley, tennis courts or swimming pool. Older students may engage in more structured sports, such as kick ball and t-ball. It may include playing with peers, learning to take turns when playing or learning to load a CD player to listen to their favorite music.

Career Education

There is a need for general vocational education, as offered in the traditional core curriculum, as well as the need for career education offered specifically for blind and visually impaired students. Many of the skills and knowledge offered to all students through vocational education can be of value to blind and visually impaired

students. They will not be sufficient, however, to prepare students for adult life, since such instruction assumes a basic knowledge of the world of work based on prior visual experiences. Through field trips and other experiences, career education in an expanded core curriculum will provide the visually impaired learner of all ages with the opportunity to learn first-hand the work done by the fireman or policeman, the gardener, the chef, the artist, etc. It will provide the student opportunities to explore strengths and interests in a pretend play-based manner. Our basic knowledge of the world of work is based a great deal on things we've seen others do. Our children with visual impairments may not have similar experiences,

Technology

Technology is a tool to unlock learning and expand the horizons of students. It is not, in reality, a curriculum area. However, it is added to the expanded core curriculum because technology occupies a special place in the education of blind and visually impaired students. Technology can be a great equalizer. For the Braille user, it allows the student to provide feedback to teachers by first producing material in Braille for personal use, and then in print for the teacher, classmates, and parents. It gives blind persons the capability of keeping track of information. It brings the gift of a library under the fingertips of the visually impaired person. Technology enhances communication and learning, as well as expands the world of blind and visually impaired persons in many significant ways. Thus, technology is a tool to master, and is essential as a part of the expanded core curriculum. In preschool, it may be as simple as using a voice output touch switch to greet others or to participate actively in a simple story.

Sensory Efficiency Skills

The visual acuity of children diagnosed as being visually impaired varies greatly. Through the use of thorough, systematic training, most students with remaining functional vision can be taught to better and more efficiently utilize their remaining vision. They must also be encouraged to use their other senses such as hearing, touch and movement through focused instruction. The responsibility for performing a functional vision assessment, planning appropriate learning activities to encourage our children to use their senses in effective and efficient ways is clearly an area of the expanded core curriculum.

Independent Living Skills (ILS)

Opportunities for learning specific living skills and personal independence are provided to all depending on their skill level. Students are involved in activities of

independent living throughout the day whether it is taking their coat off, brushing teeth, bringing a spoon to their mouth or potty training.

Orientation and Mobility (Independent Travel)

Independent movement is critical for all children with visual impairments and physical impairments. Orientation and mobility skills should begin to be developed in infancy starting with basic body awareness and movement, and continuing into adulthood as the individual masters skills that permit him/her to explore and travel the world efficiently, effectively, safely, and gracefully. Our Orientation and Mobility Specialists consult with all classrooms. Individual students receive direct orientation and mobility services as dictated by their IEPs.

Additional Services

Speech-language therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy and nursing services are available to students whose IEPs indicate that those services are necessary.

We look forward to working with your children and helping them grow to their greatest potential. Thank you for sharing your children with us!