

**Little Eagles Learning Center
@
Florida Gulf Coast University**

An Educational Research Center for Child Development

<https://www.fgcu.edu/coe/coe-communities/littleeagleslearningcenter/>

FAMILY HANDBOOK



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Introduction

Background

The Little Eagles Learning Center is the realization of a community dream that began during the design of Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in Fort Myers. The construction of the Center was completed on the new campus in May 1998. The Department of Children & Families first licensed the program on June 24, 1998, which was also the date the first child entered the program. The Center obtained full enrollment by August 24, 1998, the first day of classes of the University's second year of operation. The Center is one of ten Educational Research Centers for Child Development (ERCCD) in Florida's state university system.

Center staff and parents began the Accreditation process with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in January 1999. NAEYC awarded accreditation on NAEYC on September 30, 1999. In 2002, the Center received reaccreditation yearly since opening with the most recent accreditation valid through September 1, 2021.

The primary purpose of the Center is to serve children of university students who attend classes and work and the university community at large including faculty and staff. Approximately 50% of the Center's enrollment is children of university students; approximately 40% are children of faculty and staff; and approximately 10% are children who reside in the community. The Center also serves as a practica site for students studying child development and education, a site for fulfilling the university's service-learning requirement, a site for part-time student employment, and a site for research. The Center also serves as an early care and educational model center for the community.

Curriculum

Curriculum at The Little Eagles Learning Center includes all daily activities, interactions among children and adults, and learning materials and equipment arranged and planned in a manner that is conducive to learning. In addition, curriculum provides the basis for all actions and interactions including attitudes and predispositions based on preconceived values since all of these influence how teachers respond to children, facilitate their development, influence their choices of activities, and what and how children learn. In the broadest sense curriculum is everything that affects children's learning. The Little Eagles Learning Center expects some aspects of the curriculum be unplanned but rather emerge as children's questions, interests, and needs arise.

Mission and Goals

The mission and goals of the Little Eagles Learning Center are:

- To promote the social, emotional, moral, cognitive, language and physical development of each child by:
 - providing support and resources for families
 - forming and enhancing nurturing relationships between each child and teacher where each child is cherished for his or her own unique qualities
 - creating a rich developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum
- To build partnerships with families through mutual respect, open communication, and opportunities for active participation.
- To facilitate interactions between and among families.
- To model, convey and promote high quality developmentally and culturally appropriate practices in early care and education to families, professionals, and the community-at-large.
- To create a nurturing and responsive environment that provides resources and supports the personal and professional growth of the Center staff.

Adopted by the families and staff of the Little Eagles Learning Center on January 29, 1999; revised 2019.

Philosophy

The curriculum of the early care and education program at the Little Eagles Learning Center is based upon the following beliefs:

- Each child is a competent and active learner.
- Early education is based on trusting relationships and collaboration among children and adults.
- Children construct their own knowledge through active engagement with people and materials.
- Curriculum is integrated across all domains including emergent curriculum and projects.
- Each child is unique.
- Curriculum recognizes the interplay among social-emotional, cognitive, and physical growth.
- The curriculum is child-centered, interesting and dynamic.
- The curriculum includes all the objectives and activities that ultimately prepare children for school.
- Ongoing assessment of children's learning and adapting the curriculum accordingly ensures optimal child progress.

The Center is committed to providing outreach to families, professionals and community members who want a better understanding of a model curriculum for infants, toddlers and preschool children. The Center houses a Curriculum Lab of materials, books, and CDs about early care and education, for use by teachers and families may borrow.

Vision Statement

The Little Eagles Learning Center at Florida Gulf Coast University is a place where a partnership between family and school creates an optimally safe, nurturing and diverse learning environment, which all children deserve. The attitudes, beliefs, and practices of the Center will inspire others to provide for children in similar ways through creativity and action.

General Information

Ages of Children

The Little Eagles Learning Center enrolls 58 children from the age of 6 weeks to 5 years. The ten (10) children enrolled in the Infant Room range in age from 6 weeks to 15 months. The Toddler Room continues with a group of twelve (12) children from 12-24 months; the Mixed Age – Preschool Room serves a group of twenty-one (21) children from 2 to 4 years of age; and sixteen (16) 4 year olds participate in the Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Room. All children are transitioned to different classrooms based on developmentally appropriate practices, which means, when children are developmentally ready to move to a new classroom, they move. **Due to the pandemic-Covid-19-class size has been modified to reflect current CDC and FL Department of Children and Families (DCF) childcare guidelines. These are subject to change and will be altered upon notification by DCF.**

Transitioning into older classrooms

Children's assessment for classroom placement into the older classes occur by developmental ages with consideration for chronological ages and by consideration of their total development – social, physical and emotional. Consideration of children's interest level in the typical classroom activities of each group occurs as well. The receiving classroom teachers consult with the previous teachers as to the readiness of the child. Notification to parents occurs and they are encouraged to set up a transitional conference with the new receiving teacher. Teachers are with children of younger ages for at least 9 months.

Arrival and Departure Procedures

Arrival: All children and families enter through the main reception area. Upon arrival, please sign-in using the forms on the front desk for each classroom. **Each child and family member MUST wash his or her hands upon entering the classroom.** Once in the classroom stay until the teacher has welcomed your child and had an opportunity to facilitate separation. ****Due to Covid-19 this is done in the lobby restroom. Families will sign children in and out at the front desk.**

Serving all food at the center has been suspended due to Covid-19 and DCF guidelines. Children must arrive already having breakfast; this allows teachers to proceed with the day's activities.

In the event that your child's teacher is unavoidably delayed (e.g., traffic, illness, etc.), the following guideline will insure that your child is properly cared for:

Infants are taken to the Pre-K Room in a stroller.

Toddlers stay in their room and are joined by the Mixed Age Preschool teacher.

Mixed Age – Preschool children are taken to the Toddler Room.

Pre K children stay in their room and are joined by the Infant Teacher.

Departures: When picking up your child at the end of the day, please sign-out at the front desk and your child will be brought up to you. **Please use hand sanitizer before picking up your child.** It is important to speak to the teacher in order to hear a bit about your child's day; they will meet you in the lobby area to chat. If someone other than the persons identified on the pick-up list must notify the Program Assistant the day of the pick-up and the person must provide proper ID. **Due to Covid-19 children will be brought to the lobby for family pick up and will sign out with the teachers.**

Additional Thoughts:

- Please do not leave children unattended in your car.
- Please park in the designated parking spaces only.

- Only adults open and close doors in the Center.

Birthdays & Holidays

Birthdays

If you would like to celebrate your child's birthday with us, please plan a simple celebration with your child's caregivers. We suggest:

- **If you bring snacks or treats, please make sure they are nutritious and individually wrapped and preapproved by the Director.** Some children have food allergies so it is important to consult with the teacher. Teachers will have ideas and recommendations.
- Decorative plates and napkins are acceptable for Center parties. Please save party favors, candy and other accessories for home celebrations. Latex balloons are not permitted on the university campus.
- The exchange of gifts is a lovely tradition for **home** parties, but it can be costly for families in a group situation. Please keep presents at home.

Holidays

We respect and support cultural diversity in our program. To this end, we encourage children and their families to share with us the holidays that are important to their family.

As an on-site campus program, we modestly celebrate specific holidays. We prefer to focus on the seasons and learn about the traditions surrounding various holidays. In addition, we wish to preserve a predictable environment in the Center and some celebrations can be commercialized and over stimulating to young children as a group experience.

Calendar

In accordance with the FGCU calendar, the Center will close on the following days:

Labor Day

Veteran's Day

Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday

Winter Recess (week(s) between the fall and spring semesters)

New Year's Day

First two days after New Year's Day – staff in-service

VPK Spring Break (VPK only)

Some year's Good Friday

Staff In-Service Days – a Friday in August before the start of the fall semester and the Friday or Tuesday before/after Memorial Day Monday

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Memorial Day

Independence Day

Clothing and Shoes

Clothing

Children get dirty as they actively explore the world through play. Please send your child in comfortable, washable clothing. Clothing with straps, complicated buttons, zippers, and belts can be

frustrating for children learning to be self-sufficient. We maintain a change of clothing, including socks and underwear at the Center at all times. Please label all clothing items.

Shoes

We recommend your child wear “athletic” shoes. Sandals and slip-on shoes do not provide sufficient support or safety for children when they are playing.

Assessment of Children

Each child’s family completes an Ages and Stages Questionnaire upon entry and two other periods during the year. In addition, teachers schedule assessments at least twice a year. Assessment of children occurs at differing points during the academic year. In addition, teachers share information with you about your child on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis depending on the age of the child. Twice a year parent-teacher conferences are scheduled to review your child’s assessment profile and other informal assessment information. Parents may initiate a conference whenever you would like to discuss any aspect of your child’s education, growth, or development.

Confidentiality

It is essential that everyone connected with the Center be aware of the importance of confidentiality. All staff and employees sign a confidentiality agreement. Families please do not discuss events, which involve the names and descriptions of all children and families in the Center. Please observe you and the families in the center’s confidentiality at all times. We need everyone to work together to protect the privacy of all participating at the Center.

Cubbies**

Each child has an assigned a cubby for his or her personal belongings. Please check your child’s cubby daily as it also acts as a “mail box” and is where teacher place notes for home. Please limit contents to naptime blanket, soft toy and clothing changes. ****Due to Covid-19, teachers will provide daily notes to families at departure.**

Cultural Awareness

Each child has traditions or customs, which are unique to the family and its culture. To help us become better acquainted, we encourage you and other family members to volunteer and share your cultural traditions and customs with the Center. We appreciate your interest and participation in all events.

Damage to Center Property

If a child damages Center property, families will be asked to contribute toward the repair or replacement of the item, e.g., cots.

Emergencies, Evacuations, Closings

Any situation that is threatening to the health, safety or welfare of children, staff, or volunteers will be report to the appropriate agency. If a child is missing, suspected of maltreatment, injured or illness requiring hospitalization or death and/or presence of a threatening individual to the center by entry all children and staff will report to the safe station within the center. If necessary, all individuals will evacuate to Lutgert Hall, the building adjacent to the center. Families will be immediately notified by email and when possible phone calls.

Illness and Injury: In the case that a child becomes acutely ill or is injured while in the Center:

- A trained staff member will provide initial appropriate first aid treatment.
- The center will maintain a list of individuals who have access to your child's health information
- Children are moved to a quiet and safe area. IF the child cannot be moved, the other children in the classroom are moved to an adjacent classroom for their safety and the safety of all.
- Campus police will be notified immediately.
- Parent/Guardian will be contacted immediately. If a parent/guardian cannot be reached, staff will call the people on the emergency list.
- If deemed appropriate the child will be transported by ambulance to the nearest emergency department accompanied by a staff member, or hospital designated by the parent on the Medical Emergency Form.

Fire: In accordance with state licensing regulations, the Center holds a monthly fire drill. In the event of a fire:

- Each group immediately evacuates the building.
- All groups meet in a pre-designated location.
- In the event the building cannot be re-entered, the staff and the children will proceed to an indoor location.
- Parents/guardians will be contacted immediately to pick up their children.

Weather: The Little Eagles Learning Center complies with all University policies concerning closing due to extreme weather conditions. In the event that the Center closes during the day or does not open, parents will be contacted by phone by Center staff. If phones are non-operational, parents should tune to local news or television stations.

Family Communication**

We want to hear about your child's life at home and about any concerns you may have. It is helpful to us in understanding and caring for your child if you inform us of significant events at home. Feel free to talk with us at any time during the day or schedule a parent – teacher meeting. Families are always welcome to visit the Center. Please try to refrain from visiting during naptime – 12:30-2:00pm.

****Due to Covid-19 visitors are restricted at the center, please feel free to call or email if you have questions or concerns.**

Teachers need to have daily and weekly family schedules on file. This allows the teachers to know when the child will arrive and depart. When your child will not be attending school or will be late coming in that day, please call your child's classroom.

Please keep your contact information current. If your work, home or cell number changes, or you will not be at your usual number, please notify the office.

We feel it is important for us to share information with you. There are several places to check for daily information:

1. Each classroom has a bulletin board for notices, menus, lesson plans etc.
2. Each family has a folder in the classroom labeled with the child's name. These contain teacher-to-family notes, personal items, art work etc.
3. The Center notice area is above the fees box in the entry way.

Each classroom in the Center has a separate telephone line. If you need to contact your child's teacher, please call the room directly. Numbers are listed in the front of this handbook.

Food

The Center does not provide food. We asked each child to bring lunch, mid-morning and afternoon snacks. We provide state and federal USDA guidelines for the preparation of healthy meals and snacks of a quantity and quality to meet the daily nutritional needs of the children. Families with infants work with teachers to determine the developmentally appropriate time for eating habits and offering food and drink

Forms and Documents

Each family is provided with a packet upon enrollment in the program. Forms are to be completed and returned prior to the child's first day. Immunization and health records must be kept up to date as the Department of Children & Families requires that we maintain complete and current information on each child enrolled in the Center. Parents are required to notify the Center of changes in personal circumstances, e.g., address, phone number, student status and employment. Information is confidential and is provided to the teachers on a need-to-know basis.

Parents taking classes at FGCU must provide a copy of their class schedule prior to the first day of classes.

Guidance of Appropriate Social Skills

Guidance is the way we educate and support children as they develop self-control and learn what behaviors are acceptable in a group environment. When a child acts inappropriately, the teacher states clearly that the behavior is unacceptable, gives options and stays with the child to support them during this emotional time.

Guidance of Behavior at the Center

Guidance of children's behavior is viewed as an on-going process through which children are helped to develop inner controls. They are taught to respect the feelings and rights of others. Teachers model appropriate behaviors during their daily interactions with children and continually express approval and recognition. Children have the right for their basic physical care needs to be met in a timely supportive manner. These rights will never be withheld or used as a means of punishment, control, or manipulation. These rights include (1) rest and sleep, (2) nutritious food for meals and snacks, (3) access to toileting facilities and water, and (4) playtime.

Our baseline for determining what is not tolerated is fixed by those actions that can be harmful to the children themselves or others. Our goal is to define the rules and limits and enforce them in a supportive, non-punitive manner.

Accepted guidance methods are:

- Tell the child what we do not want him or her to do and briefly explain why.
- Provide the child with alternative responses.
- Redirect the child. This is particularly effective with infants and toddlers.
- Give the child the opportunity to express their feelings and engage in an elementary conflict resolution process.
- Help the child to use words.

Prohibited methods are:

- Physical punishment under any circumstances
- Humiliating or embarrassing remarks to or about children
- Frightening threats or actions
- Abusive restraints
- Time out or Scolding

Our goal is to provide children and families with options to eliminate undesirable behavior. Children will only be excused from the program after all options have been exhausted and families have been offered alternative placements and services to help the child and family. Our center acknowledges and complies with all federal and state civil rights laws. However, the center reserves the right to end childcare services at any time for any reason.

Parent-Teacher Conferences**

Children are assessed at least three times a year; generally, upon entrance to the program, in early fall then again in late spring. Teachers will post a sign-up sheet for parents to scheduled conferences. If you are unable to attend at the posted times you may request a special meeting with the teacher. Parents may request a conference at any time to discuss their child's progress. Once a year open house occurs to allow children and families to learn about the program and the families

Hours of Operation

The Little Eagles Learning Center is open Monday through Friday from 7:45 am. to 5:15 pm. The Center follows the University's calendar with a few exceptions outlined in the annual calendar provided to families annually. The hours a child attends the Center are consistent and planned prior to a child's introduction to the program. Due to staffing schedules, it is very important to notify the Center if your child will be significantly late or absent. Please call your child's classroom and/or the front desk as soon as possible. We encourage parents to leave enough time at the end of the day to communicate with the staff about the events in the child's life at home, as well as to hear from the teachers about the child's day at the Center.

Late pickup fee: The Center closes at 5:15 P.M. Tardiness in picking up your child will result in a Late Fee Charge of \$2 per minute.

Illness and Medication

Realizing how difficult it can be for parents who work outside the home to make arrangements for the care of sick children, we recommend that you plan in advance for alternate care should your child be unable to attend the program. The following guidelines govern a child's attendance in the Center's program.

- A child must be well enough to fully participate in both indoor and outdoor activities.
- If a child's health status changes during the day, the Center will ask you to pick up your child.
- **If children exhibit flu-like symptoms, the center will send children home for a minimum of 24 hours to protect all children and staff. This may mean runny noses, coughs, and general malaise. This will be at the discretion of the teacher and director.**
- Children usually need to stay home for at least 24 hours after the initial sick day so they are symptom free without medication and fully recovered.
- If a child has a fever of 100.5 degrees or greater (3 months or older), it is a state law that the child must be sent home and cannot return without medical authorization, or until the signs and symptoms of the disease are no longer present for 24 hours following the end of the fever.
- Fever is not necessarily the main criteria for determining if a child is ill. Behavioral changes might also indicate illness and exclusion from the program. These changes result in a child needing greater care from the teachers, which compromises the health and safety of the other children in the group.

- Determining whether a child is ill or has anything contagious is a difficult decision to make and a responsibility shared by teachers and parents. However, the final attendance decision will be made by the center Director and based on an assessment of the child's physical condition and behavior whether a child will be sent home for at least 24 hours.
- Common conditions for which a child may be sent home or should not attend are:

Fever of 100.5 or higher	Ear infection
Diarrhea	Chicken pox
Vomiting	Measles
Strep throat	Head lice
Impetigo	Severe coughing
Conjunctivitis (pink eye)	Difficult or rapid breathing
- A child may not return to the Center for 24 hours after the cessation of all symptoms. A child beginning antibiotics must be kept home for the first 24 hours. This is to protect the child that is ill and the other children attending the Center.

Medicines

For your information regarding administration of prescription medicine at the Little Eagles Learning Center, we have established the following guidelines:

- We encourage parents to administer medication whenever possible.
- First dose of medication is to be administered at home so reaction can be monitored.
- Each classroom has designated a teacher with primary responsibility for administering medication.
- Medication administration records are maintained in each room tracking all relevant information.
- Completed authorization forms and medication logs are kept in each room while valid. They are then transferred to the child's file in the office.
- Blank forms are kept in each room.
- Medication is stored in the child's classroom in a locked box during the period the medication is being administered.
- An authorization for each incident is to be submitted to the teachers.
- "Blanket permission" forms may be submitted for the following topical medications: diaper ointment, insect repellent, and sunscreen. These do not require documentation every time applied, however, signed consent forms must be on file with the child's folder in the office prior to admission to the program.

Guidelines for administering all prescription medication are:

- Each prescription medicine requires a medication authorization form completed and signed by the parent.
- The medication must be provided in a pharmacy prepared or original safety cap container and labeled with the name of the child, name of the physician, name of the drug, its strength, administration directions, and date of the original prescription.
- Medication will only be administered in accordance with the written order of the physician.
- All unused medication will be returned to the parent or destroyed if it is not picked up within one week following the termination of the authorization.

Thank you for working with us to maintain a healthy and safe environment for our children, staff and families.

Lost & Found

If you lose something, please check in your child's room or with the Program Assistant.

Naps/Rest

Children take a daily nap planned according to their age and development. The program provides cots and cribs. Parents are asked to provide a small, light blanket for naptime for children older than 12 months. The blanket should be an appropriate size for a 52" by 24" cot or for a crib. Children who need a soft toy or comfort object to sleep with are welcome to bring one from home. **Infants may not sleep with pacifiers that have stuffed animals or other things attached. They must use a sole pacifier only.** In accordance with the Department of Children and Families nap items are stored daily in individual plastic bags.

Parent Participation

We believe that the family enrolls in the program and therefore we maintain an open-door policy. Please feel comfortable to visit the Center at any time and spend time with your child. We welcome families to come anytime to visit.

There are also a number of specific ways that parents can participate:

- Volunteer time in your child's classroom.
- Donate recyclable objects (bubble wrap, cigar boxes, paper towel tubes etc.) or books and toys that are in good repair but your child has outgrown.
- Participate in a special event such as Thanksgiving lunch, the Holiday cookie exchange, grandparents' day, etc.
- Share a special talent such as dance, music, and storytelling.

Parking

For your convenience there are a limited number of parking spaces in front of the Center for arrival and departure. These spaces can be used for a maximum of 30 minutes. If you plan to visit for a longer period, please use Parking Lot #1. A parking permit will be needed and can be obtained at the kiosk on the right side of the main University entrance.

Restricted Items

Necklaces, money, candy, gum, balloons, and toys from home are not allowed at the Center.

Safe Sleep

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the unexpected death of a seemingly healthy baby for whom no cause of death can be determined. Child care providers can maintain safer sleep environments for babies that help lower the chance of SIDS. Florida requires that child care providers caring for children less than 12 months of age implement a safe sleep policy, share this information with parents, and provide staff training. All families will sign the policy statement upon enrollment.

Student Parent Requirements

FGCU students who enroll their children in the Center must meet the following requirements:

- Undergraduate students must take a minimum of 6 credit hours and graduate students must take a minimum of 3 credit hours during both Fall and Spring semesters in be able to enjoy student

fees rates and for children to continue their enrollment at the Center (this applies to one or both parents, parents may not combine hours).

- For graduating students, your child's last semester in the Center will be the semester you are graduating unless you will be going to graduate school.
- Parents risk losing their child's place in the Center if the student drops any classes, goes below the credit hour requirements or withdraws from school.
- Sometimes parents have special circumstances and may wish to request a waiver. A letter describing the situation can be submitted to the Director. The Center's Advisory Board will review the request and decide if a waiver is possible.

Sunscreen

As part of your morning routine, we ask that you put sunscreen on your child before coming to school. Due to the intense sun in Southwest Florida, we want all children to be protected from harmful rays when playing, strolling, and walking outside.

Taxes

The Center's tax I.D. number is 65-0753801. Should you need it, the Program Assistant can provide a printed statement showing the total fees paid for the calendar year.

Termination of Child Care Privileges

In rare instances it may become apparent that the program is unable to meet the expectations of the family or provide the level of care demanded by a child. In these cases, the program, after discussion with the family, will require the family to make other child care arrangements within 30-days. **The center reserves the right to end childcare services at any time for any reason.**

Toys from Home

Children often want to bring toys from home to school. However, this creates a number of issues in the classroom for staff and peers. Please leave toys at home even if they might seem educational.

Transition to the Center

For children of all ages the transition into early care and education represents a separation from their families, which needs to be thoughtfully considered and planned. In order to help children adjust to this experience the process needs to be gradual. Families of children enrolling in the Center are expected to spend time at the beginning of the child's entry into the program helping her or him to adjust to the new environment. The length of the transition period is individually determined by the child's age, temperament and experience with separation.

The importance of planning this initial transition time cannot be underestimated. A supportive transition lays the foundation for the child's trust in the teachers and her or his future ability to cope with separations.

Each child responds differently to the new experience of early care and education. Children who seem comfortable initially may show some discomfort or regression weeks later. Teachers and families share in doing all they can to help children feel more comfortable. To this end, please keep the Center informed of any changes you observe at home and let us know if you have suggestions which would be helpful to your child. Transitioning from class to class and as children grow and develop.

Fee Payments

A deposit equal to two weeks fees is required to guarantee a space in the Center. This is payable prior to your child's first day in the program. The deposit is then applied to your final fees payments when you provide the Center with at least a two-week written notification of withdrawal from the program.

Forfeiture of the deposit will occur if two-weeks' notice is not given. There are NO exceptions to this policy.

FEES ARE PAYABLE ONLY BY CREDIT CARD OR DEBIT CARD ON OUR WEBSITE:

https://secure.touchnet.com/C20748_ustores/web/store_main.jsp?STOREID=7&SINGLESTORE=true

We may not accept cash anymore.

Families may choose a payment schedule:

1. Weekly: Due every Monday.
2. Bi-weekly: Due every other Monday.
3. Monthly: Due the first Monday of the month with fees varying for either a 4- or 5-week month.

Fees are considered late if not received by the end of the day on Wednesday. A \$10.00 late fee maybe applied to your account and your child might not be allowed to participate in the Center until payment is made. Fees more than two weeks late could cause termination of childcare privileges. Fees must be paid online through the university Marketplace system. Fee are constant and designed to reserve a place for your child regardless of illness, holidays, vacation, or time between semesters.

Withdrawal from the Center

We require two-weeks' notice of withdrawal from the program to prevent families from losing their two-week deposit. Additional advanced notice would be appreciated. If you fail to provide the center with two-weeks' notice of withdrawal, your deposit is forfeited.