

NORTH MAHASKA PRESCHOOL PARENT HANDBOOK 2025-2026



We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing. *George Bernard Shaw*

North Mahaska Preschool

“building the foundation for excellence in education”

Our Philosophy

The early childhood preschool program is designed to implement a researched-based curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and promotes positive outcomes for all young children. The program is consistent with goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following domain areas, while responding to the needs of families: social/emotional development, cognitive development, physical development, and language development. Through a carefully planned environment including responsive, nurturing adults and peers, children develop the knowledge, skills, disposition and feelings that are linked with successful learning.

Multiple instructional approaches are utilized to optimize children's opportunities for learning. These approaches include strategies that range from structured to unstructured and adult-directed to child-directed. Children construct understandings through active interactions within the age-appropriate environment with adults, peers, materials, and events. We recognize that learning is an interactive process and respond to the diversity of learners by helping children to understand, respect, and appreciate individual differences.

The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of communicating with families and with sensitivity to the culture contexts in which children grow and develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.

Rationale

We recognize there has been a trend toward emphasis on formal instruction in academic skill areas in early childhood education programs. Children are capable of learning more complex language, concepts, and skills than has been previously taught. We know that early intervention is a key to successful learning. We believe that all children benefit from a developmentally appropriate preschool program facilitated by certified effective teachers. We want to identify all

children who are in need and provide the opportunity for their placement in a quality program.

Our Curriculum

Well planned, evidence-based curriculum, implemented by qualified teachers who promote learning in appropriate ways, can contribute significantly to positive outcomes for all children. Both federal and state expectations emphasize the need for scientifically based research to guide curriculum adoption and evaluations of curriculum effectiveness. Therefore, the preschool program sponsored by North Mahaska Community School District is designed to meet the needs of the children and offer a curriculum that is evidence based and of high quality. North Mahaska Preschool curriculum follows the standards and assessments set forth by the Creative Curriculum series. North Mahaska Preschool curriculum also follows the guidelines of the Iowa Early Learning Standards.

Mission Statement

To provide high-quality and age-appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment, which emphasize direct interaction with materials, with adults, and with other children.

To emphasize early childhood literacy, cognitive development, physical skills, and social-emotional development.

To involve children in setting meaningful and accessible learning goals, selecting and managing their learning, and in assessing their learning.

To employ a wide variety of instructional approaches to ensure that the learning levels and individual styles of children are accommodated.

To maintain class sizes at the primary level to twenty or below.

To increase parent involvement in our school and parent knowledge of age-appropriate learning.

Assessment

- All 4-year-old preschool students will take the following assessments
 - District Developed Assessments
 - Teaching Strategies - Gold

- Teaching Strategies Gold will be used to gather authentic student performance data through observation 2x a year. Gold will also be utilized to track student progress and plan for instruction. Teachers will enter data into Teaching Strategies Gold within each of the identified observation windows.
- Assessment results from GOLD and District Developed Assessments will be shared with parents through face-to-face conferences. Parents will be informed how their child did on the assessment, as well as how to support their child's learning. Parents will also be informed how their child's assessment compares to same-age level peers.
- Parents will be notified before each assessment via the preschool newsletter.
- Parents will be invited to share things they see their child doing at home as a form of assessment information.
- Creative Curriculum, Foundations, & Heggerty are the prescribed preschool curricula.

Communication

On-going two way communication between the preschool teacher and parents is an important part of preschool and one of the many ways we ensure success for your child. Here are some ways you can expect to communicate this year:

- Annual Home Visits
- Fall Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Spring Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Program Surveys
- Parent / Student Questionnaires
- Phone calls
- Newsletters
- Annual Family Fun Night

We encourage you to reach out anytime you have any questions, concerns, or things to share about your child. Your child's teacher will be communicating with you throughout the year in efforts to:

- Provide opportunities for two-way communication about your child
- Share assessment results
- Provide information for academic support at home
- Obtain feedback in efforts to meet your child's needs at preschool

Enrollment Policies

Each child must be 4-years-old on or by September 15 of the current school year. The following forms need to be completed and returned to North Mahaska Elementary School in order to enroll a child into the Preschool Program:

- 1) Health Form (physical)
- 2) Immunization Record-must be signed by a doctor or public health official. State Law requires that students must be properly immunized before entering preschool. Only students who are medically exempt or have religious exemption will be allowed to enter school without required immunizations. Parents will be required to provide documentation for exemption prior to child starting school.
- 3) Information Sheet/Parental Emergency Medical Consent and Release Forms Information on these forms will be on file to use in the event that your child becomes ill or is injured at school. It is very important that CURRENT emergency contact numbers are on file. It is the parent's responsibility to notify staff if information for the child changes. In the event your child is injured or seriously ill, this form gives the hospital the authority to treat your child, under emergency circumstances without a parent being present to admit him/her. This authority will remain in effect until revoking in writing.
- 4) North Mahaska School Enrollment Forms - online school website.
- 5) Food/Medical Allergy Form (if applicable).
- 6) Copy of your child's original birth certificate.

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance is encouraged for each child. If your child is going to be absent from school, please call the preschool teacher or the elementary office as soon as possible. Absences and tardies are recorded each day. Also, if your child rides the bus and will be absent, please call the elementary office so that arrangements can be made to notify the bus driver.

Fee Policy and Financial Agreements

There is no fee charged to attend North Mahaska Preschool Program. The program provides all materials and supplies for preschool students. The only requirement is a backpack and PE shoes. There is NO open-enrollment policy for preschool-age students. Students from any district may attend.

Transportation

Preschool students who attend the morning class can be picked up at their house on a regular bus route. Students in the morning class can be transported home by a school bus or school vehicle at the conclusion of class.

Preschool students who attend the afternoon class can be picked up at their house by a school bus or a school vehicle. Students in the afternoon class can be transported home on the regular bus route at the conclusion of class.

Preschool students that do not reside in the North Mahaska School District will need to provide transportation to current North Mahaska School District pick-up/drop off sites. Transportation to those sites is the responsibility of the parent.

Schedule

Preschool classes will meet every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 8:15-11:20 AM or Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 12:15-3:20 PM. There are no classes on Fridays. The number of students enrolled will determine the number of class sessions.

Holidays and Spring Break vacation days will follow the same schedule as the North Mahaska School District. Adjustments made to the preschool class schedule will be made for teacher in-service days and early outs by the North Mahaska Elementary Principal. Parents will be notified in advance of any changes in the schedule.

When school weather conditions or other emergencies make it necessary to close school, we will follow the pattern of the North Mahaska School District.

Arrival and Dismissal Time

Preschool begins at approx. 8:15 AM for the morning class session and ends at 11:20 AM. Preschool begins at 12:15 PM and ends at 3:20 PM for the afternoon class session. Students not coming on buses may arrive 5-10 minutes before their scheduled class time. It is required that any adult bringing your child to school, come completely into the building unless there is a preschool staff waiting at the door.

***AM class** - No child will be allowed to exit the preschool without an adult. Adults must accompany children while in the parking lot.

***PM class** - Please see the pick up procedures for the school included at the end of this handbook.

Field Trips

On occasion, the preschool classes will attend field trips in or out of town to support the curriculum. North Mahaska School transportation will be used to transport students to and from field trips. Parents are encouraged to attend field trips. Any volunteer attending field trips with the preschool will need to complete a NM Parent/Adult Volunteer form and return it to the preschool or elementary school office prior to volunteering.

Health Policy

School policy requires a child to stay home if he/she:

- Has a fever of 100.0° or higher
- Has been vomiting or has diarrhea
- Has symptoms that keep your child from participating in school or may present a disruption to the learning environment, such as:
 - Very tired or lack of appetite
 - Cough that he or she cannot control, sneezing often
 - Headache, body aches, or ear ache
 - Sore throat - a slight sore throat is ok for school, but a severe sore throat could be strep throat, even if there is no fever. Other signs of strep throat are headache and upset stomach. A special test administered at a doctor's office or clinic is needed to know if it is strep.

24-Hour Rule

- **Fever** - Keep your child home until his/her fever has been gone without the use of medicine for 24 hours. Colds can be contagious for at least 48 hours. Returning to school too soon may slow recovery and spread sickness to others.
- **Vomiting or Diarrhea** - Keep your child home for 24 hours after the last time he/she vomited or had diarrhea.

Antibiotics - Keep your child home until 24 hours after the first dose of antibiotics for any sickness such as ear infection, or strep throat.

It is a preschool policy that any adult volunteering in the preschool will follow proper handwashing procedures upon entering the room.

Toileting

For children who are unable to use the toilet consistently, the program makes sure that:

- For children who require cloth diapers, the diaper has an absorbent inner lining completely contained within an outer covering made of waterproof material that prevents the escape of feces and urine. Both the diaper and the outer covering are changed as a unit.

- Cloth diapers and clothing that are soiled by urine or feces are immediately placed in a plastic bag (without rinsing or avoidable handling) and sent home that day for laundering.

Staff check children for signs that diapers or pull-ups are wet or contain feces

- At least every two hours when children are awake and when children awaken.
- Diapers are changed when wet or soiled.
- Staff change children's diapers or soiled underwear in the designated changing areas and not elsewhere in the facility.
- Each changing area is separated by a partial wall or at least three feet from other areas that children use and is used exclusively for one designated group of children.
- At all times, caregivers have a hand on the child when being changed on an elevated surface.

In the changing area, staff

- Post changing procedures and follow changing procedures
- These procedures are used to evaluate teaching staff who change diapers.
- Surfaces used for changing and on which changing materials are placed are not used for other purposes, including temporary placement of other objects, and especially not for any object involved with food or feeding.
- Containers that hold soiled diapers and diapering materials have a lid that opens and closes tightly using a hands-free device (e.g., a step can). Containers are kept closed and are not accessible to children
- Staff members whose primary function is preparing food do not change diapers until their food preparation duties are completed for the day.
- Staff members wash hands following the changing of diapers and soiled clothes.

Administration of Medication

Students who need to have medication administered during preschool hours must follow the NM's district's medication policy.

Prescription medication shall be administered when the student's parent or guardian **and** the doctor provides a signed and dated written statement requisition for medication administration.

Non-prescription medication shall be administered when the student's parent or guardian provides a signed and dated written statement requesting medication administration.

All medication must be in their current original labeled container. All medications will be stored in the office in a secured area. A medication administration log will be maintained.

Cleaning and Sanitation

The cleaning and sanitation of working/eating surfaces, and toys will take place on a regular basis by the preschool staff and more often as needed. An appropriately mixed solution of bleach and water is used to sanitize the items. Table tops are cleaned prior to any activity involving food items. Gloves will be worn by staff preparing all snack foods.

A NM custodian sanitizes doorknobs, sinks and toilets on a regular basis to prevent the spread of germs.

Dress Code

Please provide your child with appropriate attire for the weather. Preschool students play outside, daily, all year long (weather permitting). Preschoolers are required to have indoor recess if the (real feel) temperature is 20 degrees or below. The preschool will follow North Mahaska's dress code. Please remember that racing type shirts often have tobacco and/or alcohol products on them.

Please provide an extra change of clothes, in a gallon-size Ziploc bag, to keep in your child's backpack. If any type of accident occurs, the staff will assist your child in changing into the clothes provided by them, as needed.

Visitors and Volunteers

Parents are encouraged to visit their child's classroom during the school year. Please call the preschool teacher or elementary school office prior to coming so your child's teacher can share with you the activities you will be observing.

Volunteers are also welcome at preschool. The preschool teachers have a number of ways that they can use parent or volunteer talents. Please visit with the classroom teacher and share how you might like to be involved.

Community members, grandparents, high school students, and others, are welcome to volunteer in our preschool classroom throughout the year. All volunteers are required to 1st sign in at preschool or the elementary school office.

Preschool Snacks

Preschoolers will be provided snacks from the food service program that provides services for North Mahaska Schools (LunchTime Solutions). Birthday treats must come in a prepackaged container with the entire ingredients on the

manufacturer's label. Below are some examples of snacks that will be provided to preschool students.

Fresh fruit or vegetables
Crackers
Cheese or meat sticks
Cereal Bars
Granola/Nutri-grain Bars
Rice Krispie Treats
Yogurt
100% Juice

Trail Mix
Bagels
Muffins
Pretzels
Dried Fruit
Cottage Cheese
Applesauce or mixed fruit cups
Milk

North Mahaska Birthday Treat Policy

In order to protect our students with allergies and food intolerances, treats brought for birthday celebrations must be unopened, commercially prepared food with an intact ingredient label or fresh fruit and vegetables.

Students will not be allowed to bring treats with peanuts or any peanut products when there are known peanut allergies within the classroom. The preschool teacher will consult with the school nurse regarding students' known allergies to focus on eliminating potential exposures.

Allergy Information

For each child with special health care needs, food allergies, or special nutrition needs, the child's health care provider should provide the program with an individualized care plan prepared in consultation with family members and specialists involved in the child's care. Children with food allergies shall be protected from contact with the problem food. With family consent, the program posts information about the child's allergies in the food preparation area and in areas of the facility the child uses to serve as a visual reminder to all adults who interact with the child during the day. Program staff will keep a daily record documenting the type and quantity of food a child consumes when any child with a disability has special feeding needs and provide parents with that information.

The preschool program will not withhold food or beverages as a punishment, nor will teaching staff ever threaten to withhold food as a form of discipline.

Grievance Policy

Any questions or concerns regarding the preschool program should be first discussed with your child's teacher. If further communication is needed the elementary principal may be contacted. Any grievances, differences, or disagreements with the preschool program or the teacher will fall under the jurisdiction of the North Mahaska Community School District School Board Policy.

A NO SMOKING LAW is in effect at the preschool, in the parking area, in the outdoor play area, or anywhere on the school grounds. All citizens are required to follow the NO SMOKING LAW. This also includes all preschool functions, i.e. programs, open house, or any type of field trip.

***Handbook updated April 2025**

Student Pick Up and Drop Off Procedures for Grades PK-6

Student Pick Up and Drop Off

Safety is of utmost importance and while Driveline may be a bit of a challenge for parents, it is definitely worth it for the safety of our students!!!. We are going to continue the pick up procedures for the 2025-2026 school year. Each family will need a number to be displayed during student pick up. The numbers will be distributed during back to school night on August 21.

Your help is needed in **ensuring student safety** with pick up and drop off.

Please follow these steps during morning drop off:

1. Do not leave your vehicle unattended in the circle drive. If you need to enter school with your child, please park in a designated parking space. Do not block the flow of traffic in the circle.
2. You may momentarily pull up to the circle drive of the elementary to drop your child Off on the sidewalk. Do not double park to drop students off. This creates danger for students.
3. **Please ensure you are adjacent to the side walk when you drop your child off to enter school.**

Please follow these steps during STUDENT PICK UP at the end of the day:

Please do not arrive before 3:20 p.m. as buses need to enter the south drive for pick up.

- Traffic will be ONE way once you get past the first entrance of the jr./sr. high on 2163-135th street. When you see the one way sign, parents should form two lines on 2163-135th street with their vehicle for student pick up.
- NM Staff will alert parents when it is time to move into the circle drive. Buses do not line up until 3:20. We can't move traffic up into the circle drive until the buses have lined up.
- Traffic will form two lines in the elementary circle drive, travel along the south side of the parked cars, and then exit onto 2163-135th street at the west end of the south parking lot. (see visual provided within this communication)
- Traffic will Park in the circle drive (two lines) for student pick up. Parents should stay in their vehicles and the students will come to you.
- Traffic will not move in the circle drive until all students in the pick up group are in the vehicle. It is anticipated there will be various pick up groups. Once all students have been loaded, the traffic attendant will remove the cones and signal that the traffic may exit.
- Each parent will be given an assigned number that is connected to their student's name. *It is important to note that some families will have multiple numbers. All numbers should be displayed in a visible location in the front windshield. A staff member will come by and enter the number you have on display in your windshield into their driveline app. This will alert teachers to dismiss your student(s) to the pick up lane. Numbers will be sent home with your student at back to school night on August 21.
- **Once your student(s) is safely loaded, you will need to take down your number.** This alerts staff that your student is safely loaded.
- If you arrive for student pick up without your tag, you will need to park your vehicle and then verify through the office that you are approved for pick up.
- If you have designated other persons to pick up your student, you will be given an extra tag assigned to that person which will need to be given to them before they arrive at pick up.

Anticipating Potential Questions Regarding Student Pick Up At The End of Day-

1. *Are parents allowed to walk up and pick their student up as they have done in the past?*
The goal is to improve safety for students. No traffic is to be moving while students are moving. If parents are able to park (outside of the circle drive) in a designated angled parking space and use the sidewalk and crosswalk to exit the circle drive, they may still walk up and get their student. Please do not leave vehicles unattended on 2163-135th street.
2. *What happens if I am parked in the circle drive for student pick up and my student is not ready for dismissal?* If your student is not ready for dismissal, it is possible that you may be asked to exit the circle drive when the group of vehicles exits and then reenter the circle drive for pick up.
3. *If my student has an older sibling, are the younger siblings permitted to walk to the north parking lot to ride home with their siblings?* No. High school drivers who are picking up

elementary students must drive to the designated pick up zone on the south side of the school. Please note, high school drivers picking up an elementary sibling will have to exit north from the north parking lot and then enter the south side pick up zone from the west end of 2163-135th street from Hwy 163.

4. *Where do I pick up my Jr./Sr. High Student?* Parents picking up jr./sr. high parents should pick their student on the west side of the jr./sr. high between the school and the softball field.

If a parent currently picks up their student from the north parking lot along the east sidewalk, may they continue to do so? Yes, if you currently are picking up on the north side of the school and your child can be picked up directly from the east sidewalk, you may continue to do so.