



# Hillsboro PreK Inclusion Handbook

## for Caregivers of Children with Special Needs (“IEP”)

### HILLSBORO EARLY CHILDHOOD PRESCHOOL FOR ALL PROGRAM

Hillsboro Early Childhood Program (Preschool For All-PFA) is an Illinois State Board grant funded preschool program for children 3-5 years of age. Our classrooms are located at 2 attendance sites in the district, Coffeen Early Childhood Center (formerly Coffeen Elementary School), and Hillsboro Community Child Development Center (HCCDC) on the Hillsboro hospital grounds. Both sites offer the same family involvement activities, parent resources, developmentally appropriate curriculum, certified Early Childhood teachers and state certified teaching assistants. *Our district provides the least restrictive inclusionary setting for all children, regardless of their developmental level or disability.*

### OUR MISSION STATEMENT

**It is the mission of Hillsboro Early Childhood Programs to facilitate the development of children and to strengthen and support families in their efforts to prepare their children for future school success, using research based, developmentally appropriate methods and fully including all children.**

Hillsboro PreK students will benefit from an enriching preschool environment and experience the joys of making new friends, the excitement of learning new skills, and the opportunity to develop independence. Activities are always aligned with the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards. Our curriculum is entirely *play-based* and assessment is *authentic* in the natural play setting using appropriate practices for preschool age children as outlined by The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition.

### OUR VISION

Hillsboro PreK fully believes in and supports the full inclusion of *all* children with their same-aged peers. It is our vision to provide a high-quality early childhood program where *all children are fully blended into the regular education classroom, receiving all individualized supports and services within that classroom setting.* It is our vision that children will build relationships, develop compassion, empathy, and care for others by being a member of a classroom that welcomes and embraces all children regardless of culture, race, background, ability, or disability.

## **Screening & Enrollment into PreK**

Children with special needs who are already receiving services through Early Intervention (such as speech, developmental therapy, occupational, or physical therapy) will be transitioned into PreK, to begin school on their 3rd birthday, or the first day of school after their birthday.

Early Intervention shares your child's information with Hillsboro PreK several months before your child turns three. A pre-k staff member will attend an EI transition meeting at your home with your EI case manager approximately 6 months prior to your child's 3rd birthday and answer questions you may have about the transition into pre-k.

Approximately 1 month before your child's birthday, a pre-k administrator will contact you to arrange a meeting AT the school to review your child's current EI services and eligibility. If it is determined at that time that your child is still eligible to receive special services in pre-k, paperwork will be completed to have your child begin school on their 3rd birthday, or the first day of school after their birthday.

## **What is an IEP?**

IEP stands for "Individualized Education Plan". If your child has an "IEP", that means that a team of specialists has determined that your child might have delays in one or more areas that is negatively impacting their learning or development, and would benefit from receiving some extra support at school. An IEP is a legal document developed by your child's IEP Team. The IEP team includes your child's teacher, their school administrator, a school psychologist, a school social worker, therapists or service providers that may provide support for your child (example: a speech therapist or special education teacher, etc.), and most importantly, YOU! The IEP team work together to identify your child's strengths, and also the areas in which they may need additional support in the classroom. The team will identify individual goals for your child, and the types of support that might help them reach those goals. YOU as the parent(s) are a valuable part of helping determine those needs and goals.

## **Your Child's School Day**

All preschoolers in Hillsboro School District's PreK are placed in "regular education" classrooms with their same aged peers. We do not have any self-contained (special education-only) classrooms. Students with IEPs or special needs are blended together in classrooms with their typically developing, same-aged peers. Each classroom is staffed by a PreK teacher, a PreK teaching assistant, and a special education teaching assistant. Our pre-k special education teacher (who is also your child's IEP "case manager") co-teaches in your child's classroom one full day per week, and may also come into your child's classroom to work with them at other times as well. The special education teacher facilitates your child's support with their social and academic goals within their regular classroom setting.

Your child may also receive other support services, such as speech & language therapy, physical therapy, or occupational therapy. Those services are provided for the number of minutes determined in their IEP within their regular school day. Due to our service providers' travel schedules or the nature of their services, your child may be pulled out of their classroom once or twice a week for a short period of time (typically no more than 20 minutes at one time) for a therapy, but our goal is to provide those services within your child's classroom to the greatest extent possible.

### **Individual Support & Accommodations for your child**

All classroom environments & spaces are mindfully arranged to allow the space needed for adaptive furniture and equipment for routine care, both for indoor and outdoor play and learning. Some examples of this include: allowing space between furniture for wheelchairs and walkers, adaptive chairs, trikes, & swings, stools, and sidewalks and ramps to playground equipment. All students are encouraged to interact with and include one another in play, regardless of age or ability.

Lesson plans and daily activities are modified for students with special needs to accommodate their unique needs and their IEP goals. Examples may include making physical modifications to a game for a child with fine or gross motor delays, such as adding a piece of foam to the back of a nametag to make it easier to grab, or simplifying an academic concept for a student with a cognitive delay (sort by color rather than patterning).

Other commonly used adaptations and modifications used to support children's individual needs in the classroom include, but are not limited to:

- Special seating (booster, flat mat, carpet circle, picture of the child, close proximity to adult, etc.)
- Fidgets, chew toys, vibrating toys, sensory toys, etc.
- Sound cancelling ear muffs for children sensitive to loud noises
- Alternatives to classroom routine:
  - Allowing extra movement
  - Permission to leave large group and given an alternative educational option
  - Read stories 1-1 or small group instead of with whole group
- Sensory Breaks: Sensory room, hallway, gym, playground/swing, OR even IN classroom...beans, deep pressure, "calm corner", etc.
- Social Stories: short teacher-made book that describes expectation for a particular behavior (example: when I feel mad, no biting, toileting, riding bus, etc.) using brief/simple and clear phrases or sentences.
- Visuals: Large picture schedule for whole class; Smaller individual picture schedule, first/then charts; simple signs for "stand", "sit", "quiet", "almost done", so children can see visual expectations and 1-1 instructions in addition to or in lieu of the verbal instruction.

### **Communication Between Home and School**

We value parent/caregiver's priorities & goals for your child's participation in PreK, as well as your family's routines and strategies that support your child's development and learning. To encourage regular and ongoing communication between school and home, we use a variety of methods to stay in contact with caregivers. We hold **home visits, open house, & orientation** at the beginning of the school year. **Parent-Teacher Conferences** are held twice a year, as well as an annual **IEP meeting** to review your child's individual plan.

Our teachers communicate with families regularly using **text messaging** (often via an app that allows teachers to reach student's parents easily), private classroom **Facebook** groups, and **email**. Each child has a **folder in their backpack** that staff use as a journal in which caregivers and teachers may send notes back and forth to school. For our students that may be non-verbal or have limited communication abilities, "**Daily Communication Sheets**" are sent home daily to share greater detail about your child's day, who they played with, what special services they received, etc.

Your child's case manager (special education teacher) also serves as a liaison between the school and home. If you have questions about your child or the services that they are receiving, you can always reach out to your child's case manager and she can help answer your questions, or put you in touch with the right person. You are always welcome to reach out and contact your child's classroom teacher or special education teacher any time that you have a question, and may request a meeting more frequently if you would like as well!

### **Participation in School Functions**

Children with special needs and their families are fully included in all programming offered by our pre-k. Childcare is typically offered during parent workshops, and families of children with special needs are invited (but not required) to come 30 minutes early to our Fall & Spring Family Fun Nights. You are welcome to stay the entire time of the event, but this early arrival is offered in an effort to support children who may feel overwhelmed by larger crowds, or to reduce wait time for children who may struggle to wait or transition. Support staff are always available to provide support to families that may need assistance during the event.

### **Parent Advisory Committee**

The PreK Parent Advisory Committee ("PAC") is a blended group consisting of parents, teachers, aides, school leaders, birth to 3 staff, and community members. All pre-k families are invited to be a part of this committee, including families of children with special needs, and families from a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This group meets approximately 4 times per year. Members of the group are a voice for sharing their perspectives on what is going well in our program, what they feel could be improved, and in what ways Hillsboro PreK can best support our families and students. Information and feedback gathered from these meetings is used for future planning of parent workshops, family events, outreach, and communication

practices within our program. **We encourage parents of children with special needs to join us on this committee and to share your valued voice, opinions, and feedback!**

## Resources for Parents

### Family Resource Specialist

Not only does Hillsboro PreK work with your CHILD, we also provide FAMILY support. In addition to your child's teachers and case manager, Hillsboro PreK also has a Family Resource Specialist (FRS) on staff. The role of the FRS is to find out what type of support our pre-k families need, and then offer resources to support families in those areas. We offer Parent Workshops, Tip Sheets, Family Engagement Activities for all of our families, but also provided 1-1 support for families with specific or unique needs. Frequently utilized resources include strategies for behavior management, toilet training, how to encourage your child to try new or nutritious foods, or helping children with anxiety transition between home and school. Our FRS can also help families seek out community and public resources for situations including housing, financial assistance, and medical care. You can get in touch with our FRS by calling the school or asking your teacher to have the FRS reach out to you! 217-532-7822

### Local Support Group

The Hillsboro Community has a long-standing support group for families of children with special needs called The Autism Support Connection. While "autism" is in the name of the group, any family with a child with special needs is welcome to participate. This group meets monthly, providing child care for children, while parents gather to talk with others walking a similar journey. The Orpheum Theater also hosts a "sensory friendly film" once a month for this group, including lower volume, lights on, and with the understanding that children may not be sitting still or quietly throughout the film. You can find more information about the group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mcasg>.

### StarNet

Illinois StarNet is a FREE program funded by the State of Illinois, and provides support to early childhood professionals and **to FAMILIES of children with special needs**. They offer *FREE* trainings and workshops, as well as support groups and events for parents. Hillsboro PreK has had the opportunity to take advantage of these resources and get to know the StarNet staff personally over the past several years, and we highly recommend and encourage our families of children with special needs to take advantage of this great resource for support!

<https://starnetiv.org/>

***Please do not ever hesitate to reach out to us with any questions you may have about your child and their education. Parenting any child has it's share of joys and challenges, but having a child with special needs adds even more obstacles to navigate. We want your experience with Hillsboro PreK and your entry into the Hillsboro School District to be a positive one.***

***We are here to support you!***