

PARK DISTRICT OF OAK PARK

Parent Handbook



2026-2027



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www.pdop.org

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Welcome to the Park District of Oak Park's Nature Preschool and Pre-K programs! Your child is about to begin an exciting journey this school year—one filled with opportunities to learn and grow socially, emotionally, and cognitively in a nurturing, play-based emergent environment. Each day, they will come to school excitedly to explore, create, and connect with others.

This handbook includes essential information and answers many frequently asked questions about our programs. In addition to what you will find here, you will receive ongoing communication from your child's teachers throughout the year. These updates, handouts, emails, phone calls, and daily interactions—will help keep you informed about the curriculum, class routines, and your child's development.

We encourage you to take time to review the policies and procedures outlined in the following pages. This handbook is designed to be a helpful reference to support you and your child throughout the school year.

We are so excited to partner with you as we learn, grow, and play together. If you have any questions or need anything at all, please do not hesitate to reach out. The teachers and I look forward to a safe, joyful, and enriching school year with your child!

Warmly,

Pilar Martinez
Early Childhood Program Supervisor
Pilar.Martinez@pdop.org
(708)725-3135



Staff

Our teachers bring a wide range of experience in both education and recreation. They are dedicated to creating a safe, engaging, and positive environment for every child. We take great pride in the quality of our staff and their commitment to ongoing professional development.

All our teachers have passed comprehensive background checks and maintained current First Aid and CPR certifications. Additionally, they complete at least fifteen hours of continuing education each year through early childhood workshops, college courses, or conferences.

Many of our teachers have been with us for years and hold certifications in the field of education. They invest deeply in our program, and we truly value their unique strengths and collaborative spirit.

Center/Program Contact Information

<u>Location</u>	<u>Program</u>	<u>Cell Phone Number</u>	<u>Email Address</u>
Carroll Center	Nature Preschool	(708) 851-8476	Nature.Preschool@pdop.org
Carroll Center	Pre-Kindergarten	(708) 851-8476	Carroll.prek@pdop.org



Our Goals

Nature Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten

Our early childhood programs offer a developmentally appropriate and nurturing environment where young children thrive socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Through hands-on exploration, discovery, and meaningful social interactions, children begin to build a lifelong love of learning.

Guided by experienced teachers, our center-based activities engage children in key learning areas such as literacy, math, science, art, and motor development. Each experience is thoughtfully designed to support 21st-century skills like problem-solving, collaboration, and flexible thinking—essential tools for kindergarten readiness and future success.

Park District of Oak Park Mission

In partnership with the community, we enrich lives by providing meaningful experiences through high-quality programs, welcoming parks, and accessible facilities.

Our Curriculum

Preschool: Learning Through Play

Our preschool programs follow an emergent, play-based curriculum that centers on the interests of the children. We believe play is essential to every child's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Play is meaningful because it:

- Fosters self-awareness, self-control, and confidence
- Build communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills
- Encourages curiosity, independence, and responsible risk-taking
- Develops academic foundations through hands-on exploration and discovery

Children learn through both structured, teacher-guided activities and unstructured, child-led play during center time. They are introduced to colors, numbers, letters, shapes, and relational concepts through a variety of experiences that support large and fine motor development. Open-ended play in areas such as dramatic play, science, math, literacy, and art enhances their understanding and love for learning. Each week, teachers provide a curriculum calendar outlining the concepts and themes your child will explore—always using play as the foundation for meaningful learning.



Separation Anxiety

What if my child has a tough time separating from me?

It is completely normal for children between 18 months (about 1 and a half years) and 5 years old to experience separation anxiety. While it can be challenging, these feelings are a healthy part of growing up and learning to feel safe in new environments. Enrichment classes offer a fun, supportive first step toward independence by helping children become familiar with routines, teachers, and peers in a low-pressure setting. Over time, these experiences build confidence and resilience, making the transition to preschool and other classroom environments feel more comfortable and positive.

Why is play-based learning important? Learning by exploring and experimenting helps retain information naturally by building practical skills while engaging.

What teaching strategies work best for preschool children or younger? Instructors follow the child's lead through hands on activities, play, stories, songs, routines, positive encouragement, and opportunities to explore at their own pace.

What are the major stages of early childhood development? EC development stages include physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional growth. These areas develop together as children learn and interact with the world.

What activities build social skills? Activities like cooperative games, pretend play, group projects, story time, and turn-taking help children learn sharing, communication, empathy, and teamwork.

Why is observation important in early childhood education? Observations help teachers understand each child's strengths, interests, and needs so they can support learning and share progress with families.



Preschool

Nature Preschool (Ages 3–4)

Our Nature Preschool program invites children to engage in age-appropriate, play-based activities that support their social, emotional, and cognitive development. Each day offers opportunities for exploration, discovery, and creativity, with classroom experiences tailored to meet the individual needs of every child.

Children are introduced to foundational concepts such as letters, numbers, shapes, colors, and themed topics in a fun and meaningful way. Teachers place a strong emphasis on problem-solving, real-life connections, and peer relationships—incorporating early math, literacy, science, and social skills into daily activities to create a well-rounded and enriching experience.

While we prefer that preschool participants are potty/toilet-trained, we are happy to work with families as children continue to develop independence in this area.

8:30-8:35	Welcome/Sign-in
8:35-8:55	Outside Fine Motor
8:55-9:10	Outside Circle time
9:10-10:30	Outside Gross Motor and Transition Inside
10:30-10:40	Snack and clean up
10:40-11:15	Manipulatives and Art/Science/Math
11:15 – 11:30	Closing Story time/Finger plays/Songs

Please note program schedules vary per program and are guidelines for classroom routines; adjustments to daily schedules may occur due to unique events, activities, or student needs.



Pre-Kindergarten

Pre-Kindergarten (Ages 4–5)

Our Pre-Kindergarten program provides a developmentally appropriate, play-based learning environment tailored to prepare children for the next step in their educational journey.

Activities are designed to encourage independence and collaboration, with opportunities to work individually, in small groups, and as a class.

The curriculum focuses on phonemic awareness, early writing, math, and reading readiness, while fostering problem-solving skills and independent thinking. Through hands-on experiences with materials, peer interactions, and meaningful teacher guidance, children gain the skills and confidence they need for future academic success.

Pre-Kindergarten Sample Class Schedule

8:30-8:35	Welcome/Sign-in
8:35-8:55	Outside Fine Motor
8:55-9:10	Outside Circle time
9:10-10:30	Outside Gross Motor and Transition Inside
10:30-10:40	Snack and clean up
10:40-11:15	Manipulatives and Art/Science/Math
11:15 – 12:00	Transition to Kindergarten Readiness Class

Please note program schedules vary per program/ center and are guidelines for classroom routines; adjustments to daily schedules may occur due to unique events, activities, or student needs.



Program Times and Locations

Carroll Center – 1125 S. Kenilworth Avenue

Nature Preschool

- Monday, Wednesday, Friday – 8:30–11:30 AM (Ages 3–4)
- Tuesday, Thursday – 8:30–11:30 AM (Ages 3–4)

Pre-Kindergarten

- Monday–Friday – 8:30 AM–12:00 PM (Ages 4–5)

Age Eligibility and District Guidelines

All Nature Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten programs in the Park District of Oak Park follow the Illinois State standard of a **September 1st birthday cut-off** for age eligibility.

Beginning with the **2026–27 school year**, **Oak Park School District 97** requires children to be enrolled in the grade that aligns with their age. In some cases, this may mean that enrolling your child in an additional year of Preschool could result in them **skipping Kindergarten**.

For more information about District 97's enrollment policy, follow this link (opd9.org). If you have questions about which program is the best fit for your child, please contact the program supervisor for guidance.



Registration

Information

Registration is available online through **Amilia** until **late August 2026**. All enrollments must be completed online. At the time of registration, you will need to:

- Pay a **\$100 non-refundable administration fee**
- Pay the **first month's tuition** (fees vary by program)

After registration, you will receive a **welcome email** with a link to submit your child's emergency contact information, birth certificate, health form, and other required documents.

Priority Enrollment

- **Oak Park residents** currently enrolled in Nature Preschool or Pre-Kindergarten receive **priority registration** for the following school year.
- **Siblings** of currently enrolled Oak Park households are also eligible for priority enrollment.
- **Non-residents currently enrolled** in the program will have access to a special **non-resident priority** registration window.
- **New non-residents** may register only after the priority windows have passed, ensuring Oak Park residents and returning families are served first. **Administration Fee**

The **\$100 non-refundable administration fee** helps cover program costs.

Paperwork Requirements

- Emergency form and health information **must be completed online** before your child's First day.

Enrollment Deadline

Children must be enrolled **at least three business days** before their first day of school. This time allows staff to process their registration, collect paperwork, and give teachers time to prepare for their child's arrival.



Monthly Payment Information

Monthly Payments

Payments are due by the **15th of each month**.

- The payment made in **May 2026** will cover **September 2026**.
- The payment due on **September 15, 2026**, will cover **October 2026**, and so on each month thereafter.
- The **credit card on file** from registration will be charged for payments. If you need to use a different card, please **update your payment information** in your Amilia account.

Refund Policy & Receipts

Refunds will be prorated based on the number of full program days remaining in the month after withdrawal. Daily rates vary by program and will be calculated upon receipt of the required **Program Withdrawal Request** form. This rate is determined by dividing the total annual tuition for your child's specific program by the total number of attendance days.

Refunds apply only to scheduled program days within the month. Scheduled school holidays and breaks are excluded. No discounts or refunds are provided for absences, and payments may not be deducted for days a child is registered but does not attend.

Withdraw from the Program

If you need to withdraw at any time, please contact the Program Supervisor at **(708) 725-3135**. A **two-week notice** is required. This ensures proper cancellation of automatic payments, communication with teachers, and a smooth transition for your child.

If notification is not provided with a clear last day of attendance, billing will continue.

Receipts and Tax Information

Receipts are available anytime through your family account at www.pdop.org. You can also request receipts to be emailed or printed during program fee payments at the Administrative Office. Tax statements can be mailed upon request at the end of the year.

The Park District of Oak Park's Tax ID Number is **36-6006028**



Sign-In/Sign-out Procedure

Sign-In:

Please do not bring your child more than **five minutes before class** begins, as teachers need time to prepare for the day. Upon arrival, staff will perform a health check to help prevent the spread of germs. Children will start the day by washing their hands, using the restroom, and changing into indoor shoes or slippers, which should remain at school. For everyone's safety, we ask that **drop-off** occurs at the **Nature Play area** at the south end of the building rather than directly at the classroom door.

Teachers will use tablets or phones to check your child in, so please be aware of delays during this process. Please make sure your child is a picture in their Amilia profile.

Sign-Out:

Pick-up time is **promptly at the end** of your child's scheduled program. Staff will sign out your child at pick-up.

Only individuals listed as authorized pick-up caregivers in the **Emergency Contact Form** in your Amilia Activity Messenger account (completed before the first day) may pick up your child. Teachers will use tablets or phones to check your child out, so a brief delay may occur.

If you want to authorize more people for pick-up, please update the emergency contact form. The Park District requires written or verbal notification from parents for any changes to the authorized pick-up list.

Please inform anyone who picks up your child that they will be asked to show **photo identification**. This policy applies to all individuals, including parents, especially those who do not regularly pick up the child.

If teachers have any questions about an individual's authorization to pick up your child, you will be contacted **before your child is released**.

While we strive to follow parental wishes regarding pick-up, the Park District **cannot prevent a parent from picking up their child unless legal documentation is provided**. Please confidentially share any custody arrangements or restrictions with the Program Supervisor to ensure proper adherence to your child's authorized pick-up procedures and any applicable court orders.



Late Pick-Up Policy

If you are running late, please call your child's teachers on the program's cell phone to notify them of your expected arrival time (see page 3 for contact information). If you are stuck in traffic or unable to pick up your child for any reason, please contact one of the authorized adults listed on your child's emergency contact form.

If we have not heard from a parent **10 minutes after the scheduled end** of the program, a responsible adult listed on your child's emergency contact form will be called to pick up your child.

If we are unable to reach anyone **30 minutes after the program ends**, the Oak Park Police Department will be contacted for assistance.

If you arrive late and no one is at school, please contact the individuals on your emergency form to check if they have the child.

After **three late pick-ups of 15 minutes or more**, the Park District reserves the right to dismiss your child from the program. This policy applies for the entire school year across all program locations.



Reporting an Absence

If your child is absent from the program for any reason, including illness, please notify your child's teachers by calling the program cell phone and leaving a message or by sending an email.

When reporting an absence, please provide:

- Your name
- Your child's full name
- Reason for the absence
- Date(s) your child will be absent

Calendar, Days Off & School Holidays

Our Nature Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten programs follow the **School District 97** calendar. Please note that the Park District programs may also be closed on additional dates, such as teacher institute days or other special occasions.

Your child's teacher will keep you informed of all non-attendance days through weekly calendars, posted notices on our Homeroom App, and email reminders.

Emergency Closings

Weather-Related Closings and Notifications

For updates on weather-related school closings, Program participants will also receive email alerts and Homeroom app posts.

School District 97 may occasionally schedule a **"Remote Learning Day"** during extreme weather conditions (previously called a "Snow Day"). In such cases, Park District programs may be cancelled.

To ensure you receive these important alerts, please keep your contact information current in your Amilia account as well as joining the Homeroom app invited by the teacher in the welcome letter.

If the Park District facility where your child attends experiences technical, mechanical, or other unforeseen issues, programs will be cancelled, and parents will be promptly notified.



Health Care Policies

The Site Supervisor or Lead Teacher/designated staff will conduct visual and verbal health checks for everyone entering the center. It is the **parent's responsibility** to ensure their child is healthy before taking them to school each day.

If your child shows any symptoms of a contagious illness, please consult your healthcare provider before bringing them to the program.

Entry Restrictions

Staff will **refuse entry** to any child or adult exhibiting signs of illness, including but not limited to:

- Temperature of **100.4°F or higher**
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Congestion or runny nose
- Continuous coughing
- Symptoms of **conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)**

Contagious Infestations and Infections

Prompt treatment is required to prevent spreading to others. If your child contracts a contagious infection, other families will be notified, but their identity will remain confidential.

Below is a partial list of contagious conditions requiring a doctor's clearance note before your child can return to school (this list is not exhaustive):

- Strep throat
- Chicken pox
- Ringworm
- Head lice
- Impetigo
- Hand, foot, and mouth disease
- Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

Emergency Care Plan

Please have a plan in place in case your child becomes ill while at school. If you are unable to leave work, ensure that someone else is available to care for your child promptly. This helps ensure the well-being and comfort of your child, as well as the health and safety of other students and staff.

Health and Illness Policy

All PDOP Nature Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten classes follow the guidance of the Village of Oak Park Local Health Department and other applicable authorities.

- Children must be symptom-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication before returning to school.
- If your child is absent due to illness, please notify their teachers by calling the class camp phone and leaving a message or sending an email. Include your name, your child's full name, reason for absence, and the dates your child will be away.
- If a child becomes ill or injured while at the site, parents will be notified immediately. Please ensure that you provide a phone number where someone authorized to pick up your child can be reached promptly.
- If teachers are unable to reach a parent or guardian, they will contact the emergency contacts listed on your child's emergency information form.
- In the event of a severe injury or illness requiring medical attention, emergency services will be called to provide immediate care or transport your child to a local hospital.

Dispensing Medication

Medication Policy

If your child requires medication during program hours, please notify your child's teacher as soon as possible.

Before any medication—prescription or non-prescription—can be kept and administered at school, a **Medication Dispense Form** must be completed. These forms are available in the welcome letter or PDOP website under the Preschool tab.

All medications must be in their **original container** and clearly labeled with:

- Child's full name
- Medication name
- Prescribing doctor's name
- Dosage instructions
- Any other specific directions



Snacks

Snack Policy and Allergy Awareness

The Park District of Oak Park provides snacks for students during programming hours. To minimize risks, we **do not knowingly provide snacks that contain or may be contaminated with peanuts or tree nuts**, including:

1. All types of nuts (e.g., peanuts, walnuts, pecans, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, pistachios)
2. Foods labeled “may contain peanuts or tree nuts”
3. Foods made with equipment shared with peanuts or tree nuts
4. Foods produced in facilities that process peanuts or tree nuts
5. Foods without ingredient labels or packaging

If you wish to celebrate your child’s birthday with a special snack, please ensure the snack is **store-bought, prepackaged, and meets the peanut/tree nut-free requirements above**. For safety reasons, these snacks will be sent home with students at dismissal for families to decide on consumption.

Thank you for helping us create a safe environment for all children.

Approved Snack Examples

(These are examples, not an exhaustive list.)

- Fruit cups
- Applesauce
- Cheese bites
- Cheese & crackers
- Fresh veggies (e.g., cucumber slices, green pepper strips) with hummus
- Fresh fruit (e.g., small oranges, berries, small apples, bananas)
- Rice cakes
- Yogurt
- Graham crackers
- Granola or fruit bars
- Bagels with low-fat cream cheese
- Pita bread with hummus
- Goldfish crackers
- Animal crackers

Snacks Not Permitted Due to Choking Hazards

- Popcorn
- Whole grapes (halved grapes are acceptable)
- Uncut carrots (thin, short strips of carrots are acceptable)
- Cherry tomatoes (halved cherry tomatoes are acceptable)
- Raw vegetables not cut into small, manageable pieces

Food Allergies

Special Dietary Needs

If your child has special dietary needs due to medication, allergies, illness, or other circumstances, please notify the teachers **in writing or by email**.

Food allergies will be posted in the Park District facility's kitchen to help teachers ensure proper food distribution during class-wide snack occasions.

If your child has multiple allergies or dietary restrictions and cannot eat the snacks provided, families are welcome to supply snacks in a **clearly labeled container** specifically for their child. Please notify the **Program Supervisor and teachers** in advance.



Guidance & Discipline Policy

Preschool Discipline Policy

At the Park District of Oak Park, we use a positive and compassionate approach to discipline. Redirection, distraction, gentle persuasion, and loving guidance are our primary tools for helping children develop self-control and appropriate behavior. Our goal is always to support the well-being of each child and the group.

If a child has specific needs that cannot be effectively addressed in the classroom, we will collaborate with families to recommend outside resources.

Discipline Guidelines

1. Teachers set **developmentally appropriate limits** and behavior expectations.
2. Teachers act with **confidence, fairness, consistency, and patience** when redirecting or providing consequences.
3. Positive behavior is praised and encouraged; teachers serve as role models for appropriate actions.
4. Directions and expectations are stated in a **positive tone**, using a kind but firm voice.
5. Focus is on the child's actions—not their personality—to maintain respect, confidence, and reassurance.
6. Unexpected behavior is addressed immediately; consequences relate directly to the behavior and may include a brief period in a designated calm space to regain self-control and prepare to rejoin the group.
7. Teachers may remove a child from one play area and direct them to another or use a designated calm space to regain self-control.
8. Teachers keep misbehavior in perspective and consider the child's overall needs.
9. Parents will be involved when uncontrollable or harmful behavior persists.
10. Discipline guidelines follow all **state licensing authority** requirements.
11. **Food and bathroom privileges are never used as punishment.**
12. **Corporal or physical punishment is prohibited.**
13. All children, families, and staff must follow guidelines from authorities such as **IDPH, CDC, Village of Oak Park, and Cook County Public Health Department**, including health and sanitation practices.



Philosophy and Procedures

Discipline, redirection, and modeling help children learn self-control and appropriate behavior. Using a calming space away from the group is used briefly and thoughtfully to help a child refocus, under teacher supervision.

Dismissal Policy

The Park District can dismiss any participant whose behavior endangers themselves or others. Each situation is evaluated individually.

If a child cannot benefit from the program or negatively impacts the group despite efforts to meet their needs, dismissal may occur. In these cases, parents will be supported and referred to appropriate resources.

No refunds will be issued when dismissal is due to behavioral concerns.

Parent/Guardian Involvement

Your child's teacher will schedule **two conferences** during the school year to discuss progress and development. If you have questions or concerns at any time, additional meetings can be arranged by contacting your child's teacher directly.

A sign-up sheet for conference times will be posted online as the scheduled dates approach.

We believe that **open communication between parents and teachers is essential** to your child's success and happiness. By working together, we can ensure your child feels supported, understood, and encouraged throughout the school year.

In-House Visitors and Volunteers

This school year, we will in-house visitors, and volunteer opportunities to enrich classroom experiences. There may also be chances to volunteer outside of the classroom. If you have ideas or want to help, please contact your child's teacher.

A Day at School

Clothing & Personal Items

Please dress your child in clothes that are comfortable for exploring, playing, and getting messy! Activities may include paint, mud, glue, sand, and more, some of which may stain. Keep an extra change of clothes in your child's **Folder Size backpack** or at school for spills or accidents. Be sure to **label everything**, including clothes, shoes, and backpacks.

Please also bring a pair of shoes or slippers to be kept at school and worn indoors only.

Outdoor Play

Children will go outside daily, so dress your child for the weather. Label coats, boots, hats, etc. Footwear should be safe for climbing and running—**closed-toe; rubber-bottomed shoes** are strongly recommended.

Supplies

At the beginning of the school year, your child's teacher will provide a supply list. Occasionally, We may request additional items for special projects (like paper towel rolls or family photos). Please send a **folder-size backpack**—no small backpacks; please allow children to bring home art, papers, and notes throughout the week.

Personal Belongings

Please avoid sending valuable items to school. Items from home should remain in your child's backpack throughout the school day. The Park District and teaching staff are not responsible for lost or stolen belongings.

Specific & Special Needs

Individual Needs & Inclusion Support

If your child has specific needs, medical, developmental, behavioral, or otherwise—please make sure to **complete the appropriate sections on your Amilia account online under Extra questions** and **communicate directly with your child's teacher**. The more we know, the better we can support your child's experience. Depending on the nature of your child's needs, we may be able to make special arrangements to ensure they are comfortable and successful in our program.

Should you or your child's teacher feel additional support is needed, the Park District partners with **WSSRA (West Suburban Special Recreation Association)** to provide **inclusion aides** during program hours at **no additional cost to families**. We are proud to be an inclusive program and committed to ensuring all children have positive school experiences.

If you believe your child may benefit from an inclusion aid or additional support services, please contact the **Program Supervisor** to begin the process of finding the right fit for your child.



We Are Here for You!

Questions & Communication

Questions and comments are always welcome! If any updates or additional information are needed during the school year, it will be shared directly with families at Carroll Center.

The Park District of Oak Park looks forward to a great school year with you and your child

Carroll Center	Preschool	(708) 851-8476	Nature.Preschool@pdop.org
Carroll Center	Pre-Kindergarten	(708) 851-8476	Carroll.Prek@pdop.org
Pilar Martinez	Program Supervisor ECE	(708)-725-3135	Pilar.martinez@pdop.org



In partnership with the community, we enrich our lives by providing meaningful experiences in programs, parks, and facilities.

I acknowledge receipt of the Park District of Oak Park's policy manual and the below listed policies:

Guidance and Discipline policy

Hours of operation

Registration Procedure

Late Pick up Policy

Medical procedures

Dismissal Policy

Refund Policy and Receipts

Snack policy

Health Care Policies

Sign in/Sign out Procedure

Parent Signature:

Date: