



# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN ELEMENTARY

Dear Parents, Teachers, and Students,

I'm tremendously excited to welcome you all into this brand new community of learning and growth. The book of Psalms teaches that those who love learning are "like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper." That's my hope and prayer for each of us this year as we learn and grow together--may all of our roots grow deep and may all of our branches reach high!

I would love to meet you and get to know you better, so feel free to stop by our offices and say hello, and if I can be of any assistance throughout the school year, please let me know. Also, if you don't already have a church home, we enthusiastically invite you to worship with us on Sunday mornings [at 8:00am](#) (outdoors near the bell tower) or [9:45am](#) (online at [FirstPresbyterian.Church](http://FirstPresbyterian.Church)). There are many wonderful, creative, and enriching groups and opportunities within our First Presbyterian family, and I hope you take some time to learn about all of them, as you help this newest one to grow and thrive!

Peace and Blessings,

Rev. Neal Locke, Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church

## **ABOUT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN ELEMENTARY**

Over 40 years ago, First Presbyterian Preschool came into existence when church leaders listened to the heartfelt requests of parents in our community to provide a high quality, loving, and nurturing education for young children. Through a similar process in summer of 2020 (and conversations spanning the two previous decades) the governing boards of The First Presbyterian Church of El Paso made the decision to open First Presbyterian Elementary School for students in grades 1 through 6. A Board of Directors was appointed to begin an Elementary School with doors set to open to students in September 2020. The school will begin small with plans to expand in coming years. Like the preschool, the elementary school embraces the Reggio Emilia approach to learning and child development.

## **PHILOSOPHY**

First Presbyterian Elementary School seeks to cultivate a progressive, collaborative learning environment that reveals and empowers the worth, dignity, and limitless potential of all children, fostering life-long learners. As a Reggio Emilia inspired school, we honor and facilitate each child's divinely-bestowed desire to discover, inquire, and explore the world around them, stewarding emergent generations of confident creators. Together, parents, teachers and students, develop and nurture individualized opportunities for physical, social, spiritual, and intellectual development. Sponsored by a Christian church, we share with our children the stories of our religious heritage, and also welcome and engage with the rich diversity of faith traditions in our community.

## **GOVERNING BODY**

The First Presbyterian Elementary School operates under the authority of the Governing Boards of First Presbyterian Church of El Paso, Texas. Direction is provided by a Board of Directors:

Heather Cuthbertson, Board Chair  
Hannah Mastriani, Treasurer  
Nicole Kuiper, Secretary  
Zazil Alvarado

Ana Blunk  
Lloyd Blunk  
Jessica Cochran  
Xavier Gonzales

Neal Locke  
Elizabeth Margo  
Alejandra Ortiz  
Erica Panetta  
Diana Stone

Jaya Vaswani  
Joseph Villescas  
Malyssa Villescas  
Anita Volf  
Catherine Zwintscher

### STAFF

**Malyssa Villescas, Organizing Director** – Ms. Villescas has over ten years of previous experience in the administrative, executive business management, and marketing fields. She served on the First Presbyterian Preschool Board of Directors for four years, is the most recent past President of that board, and gained valuable experience working closely with the preschool’s Director and Administrative Assistant.

**Neal Locke, Head of Pedagogy** - In addition to being the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Neal is a certified teacher in the State of Texas, has two decades of experience teaching in both public and private schools, and holds a Masters degree in Education from Princeton Seminary. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation through the University of Aberdeen.

### STAFF

#### **Teaching Staff:**

Mariana Villalobos, Diana Stone, Alejandra Ortiz, Anita Volf

Caregivers must obtain 24 clock hours of training each year in addition to First Aid and CPR.

### SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

#### **Admissions:**

The school is open to all children first through sixth grade, regardless of race, nationality, or creed, who may benefit from our type of program. To maintain the quality of our program, however, we reserve the right to decline to admit any child, in our sole discretion. We additionally reserve the right to withdraw any child from our program, in our sole discretion. All necessary admission paperwork, incident and accident reports, progress reports or other program documents will be filed in the school office. These files are kept confidential and, unless otherwise requested, available only to administrative and teaching staff or regulatory authorities.

#### **Classroom Placement:**

Children are assigned to a class according to their individual needs, temperament and age in consultation with parents. On occasion, a child may be transferred to other groups to better meet their needs.

#### **Core Education Program:**

School is in session Mon-Fri from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm. Teachers need time to prepare their classrooms for the day and are not free to receive students until 8:20 am. Please bring your child to school on time. This will help them prepare for the day. A child may feel uncomfortable arriving after everyone else has become involved in learning activities. When you bring your child, you must walk them to our health screening station and stay with them until their screening is completed.

#### **Afternoon Enrichment Program:**

Afternoon Enrichment is a program offered to all students who attend the elementary school running from 12:30-4:30pm. Your child may attend two, three, or five days a week depending on availability. Special enrichment opportunities are offered at this time. You will need to provide a lunch for your child. If your child’s lunch requires refrigeration, please provide an ice pack or cooling device in their packed lunch.

#### **Lunch**

You will need to provide a lunch for your child if they are enrolled in an afternoon program. If your child’s lunch requires refrigeration, please provide an ice pack or other cooling device in his/her lunch. Upon arrival, lunches should be placed in your child’s classroom cubby.

#### **Pick-up:**

Pick up is the responsibility of the authorized parent or guardian. If an emergency situation arises and you are unable to pick up your child at the designated time, please notify the school immediately, so that we can reassure your child. Children will remain with their

teachers for the first 10 minutes after the designated pick-up time. After that time, the children will be taken to the school office, where they will stay until the parent/guardian arrives. Parents of children who remain in the care of the school will be charged a fee of \$1.00 for every minute that the child remains in the care of the school. If we suspect the person picking up a child is under the influence of drugs or alcohol we will not release the child and request police assistance. Individuals unknown to teachers will be asked to show a photo ID.

#### **Cubby System:**

Our cubby system is for the children and classroom use only. These cubbies are at the children's level. We ask you to refrain from keeping any medication and other items that are harmful to children in your child's bag or cubby. Also, please do not distribute anything into another child's cubby. That must go through the teacher or office. As a reminder, we will not distribute candy or goodies.

#### **Transportation:**

Transportation is the responsibility of the parents. It is important that you keep the office up to date on the individuals authorized to pick up your child.

#### **Field Trips:**

The school encourages field trips. You will be notified in writing well in advance of each field trip. Parents are asked to attend field trips. Parents with proper insurance are also asked to drive. Each child is safely secured in a seat belt or booster seat and each car also carries a cell phone, a first aid kit and fire extinguisher.

#### **Parking Lot Safety:**

Parking lots are a source of danger to children. Please assist us in following these safety rules:

- All school foot traffic will need to enter and exit through the front church office entrance. Parking is available on the east side of the building near the church office.
- Enter and leave the parking lot with extreme caution. Be on the lookout for children.
- Always hold your child's hand when going to and from an automobile. Do not let your child run ahead of you. He or she might inadvertently run in back of a car that is just starting to back out.
- Please avoid conversing with other adults in the parking lot, unless your child is seated safely in the car with doors closed.
- On our part, we will take walks to the parking lot with your child and discuss safety precautions.
- **NEVER leave your child/children unattended in the car while picking up other children!** If necessary, ask another parent to watch your sleeping child.

#### **Health:**

The health form must be completed, signed, and dated by a physician and returned **before** the first day of school. The Texas State Department of Health rules that every child should be immunized for DTaP, Polio, HepB, Hib, PCV, MMR, Varicella and Hep A.

If your child is sick, please call the office by 8:00 am. Teachers who have often planned special activities like to know if your child will not be able to attend.

- Parents are requested to notify the school office if a child has a communicable disease such as chicken pox, streptococcal throat infection, meningitis, impetigo, head lice, conjunctivitis, etc.
- Your child may be sent home if any symptoms of illness appear during the day. In such cases, your child will be immediately isolated from the others and you will be contacted. The school will not administer any medications unless we have a signed and completed Authorization for Dispensing Medication form on file and all medications administered will be documented on the form.
- Please be sure to check backpacks for prescription medication, over the counter medication or other items that may be hazardous to children (example: food that may cause allergic reactions in other children). Sunscreen should be applied prior to your child's arrival at school. If your child requires reapplication, please provide the teacher with the sunscreen labeled with your child's name.

#### **Keep Your Child Home If He or She:**

- Has a fever or has had one during the previous 24-hour period.
- Has vomited or had diarrhea within the last 24 hours.
- Has an active cold.
- Has heavy nasal discharge.
- Has a constant cough.
- Is significantly fatigued. Rest at such times may prevent the development of serious illness.

- Has symptoms of a possible communicable disease. (These are usually sniffles, reddened eyes, sore throat, headache, and abdominal pain, plus a fever.) Please notify the school immediately if the child does have a communicable disease.
- If child has rash, please consult a physician before returning to school.

**Your Child May Come to School:**

- If a cold is over, but a minor nasal drip remains.
- If there has been an exposure to a communicable disease and the school's designated isolation period has been observed.

**Evacuation/Emergency Preparedness Plan/Security:**

While we hope that we never have to react to an emergency on our property, or in our city, we do have a formal Emergency Preparedness Plan that will be followed in such an event. We practice routine fire drills and emergency preparedness procedures. If necessary to evacuate our property, we have arranged to relocate to the YWCA located at 1600 Brown St. 79902, (915) 533-7475. You may request a copy of the full Emergency Preparedness Plan in the school office.

**Accidental Injury:**

In case of accidental injury, we will make an immediate attempt to contact a parent. If we can't reach you, we will call the child's physician. If necessary, we will also call an ambulance or paramedics. The Director, or designated staff member in Director's absence, will be in charge and make all decisions about the care of the child until the arrival of a parent, the physician, an ambulance, or paramedics. It is to your child's benefit that you keep the school up-to-date on phone numbers and emergency contacts.

**Clothing:**

As the children will be spending a lot of time outdoors, it is important to choose appropriate clothing designed for the weather of each day. Because of messy art activities and active outdoor play, provide clothing that is washable and sturdy. Jackets and sweaters should be labeled with your child's name. Send children in closed-toe rubber-soled shoes. It's a good idea to leave a complete extra set of clothing in your child's cubby.

**Special Programs:**

We celebrate religious holidays in the Sanctuary whenever possible.

**Birthdays & Other Special Days:**

We encourage students to celebrate birthdays. Miniature cupcakes, donuts or cookies are handled easily by the children and greeted as a special treat. Birthday party invitations will not be distributed in school, unless all students in the class are included. We cannot guarantee that the invitations distributed in this manner will get home. The school will celebrate many special days, including birthdays, however, we will not distribute candy, candy bags, goodies or other unhealthy items to the children. Please refrain from sending them to school.

**Birthday Book Club:**

Your child is invited to join the Birthday Book Club by donating a book or money for a book to the school in honor of his/her birthday. A special bookplate is placed inside the book giving the donor's name, birthday, and age at the time of the gift. The books are kept in the library and are available for use by all classes.

**Snow Day Procedure:**

If the El Paso Public Schools have canceled classes due to inclement weather, the school will be closed as well. However, as a safety measure for our teachers, the school may close even if the public schools are open. The school will notify you by e-mail and text if there is to be no school on a day when the public schools have decided to be open. Please do not risk your child's safety by venturing out when the roads are hazardous.

**Communication:**

Teachers communicate with parents by sending home periodic letters, e-messages and through notices posted on the bulletin boards. The school encourages close communications and cooperation between parents, teachers, and the Director. Conferences may be initiated by the parents or by the school as need arises. All teachers will hold parent conferences twice during the school year.

In the event that a significant change occurs in your home, please consider informing your child's teacher as soon as possible. All information will remain confidential. Changes that may affect your child's behavior, security, and wellbeing include: either or both parents being away from home; new person in the home; illness of either parent or sibling; any hospitalization; accident or death in the

family; new caretaker, moving; contemplated separation or divorce; or death of a pet. The classroom teacher will keep you informed of any significant changes in the school environment which may affect your child.

In the rare case in which conflict arises, please schedule a time to visit and resolve the issue with your child's teacher and/or the Director. If further action is needed, contact the Board of Directors. Please refrain from calling/texting your child's teacher during school hours. All messages during school hours should go through the school office.

### **Classroom Visits:**

Classroom visits are encouraged and welcomed. Come and spend some relaxed time with your child so you can share what goes on during a school day. However, because unscheduled visits can be disruptive to the teacher and students, we reserve the right to place restrictions on visits. We strongly encourage parents to contact the teacher prior to any classroom visits. *In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, parents will not be allowed to enter the building unless specific arrangements and exception has been given by the Director.*

### **Pets**

Pets are ordinarily not allowed on the school campus without prior permission.

### **Snacks:**

Since we aim to spend at least 50% of our day outdoors and live in a hot, dry climate for much of the year, we offer our students an opportunity for a quick snack refreshment during the morning. Please send an appropriate, easy to grab and eat on-the-go style nourishment. Children need foods that consist of good nutrients and are rich in protein, minerals, and vitamins rather than the empty calories found in sugar and fat. Snacks should not contain high fructose corn syrup, artificial sweetener or colors, hydrogenated fats or junk sugars. You will also be notified of any food allergies within the classroom and asked to be aware of and, in some cases, refrain from bringing certain items. Please plan to send water with your child daily; no other drinks are permitted during school hours.

## **HEALTHY SNACKS FOR GROWING CHILDREN**

**GRAINS**- provide complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and fiber for good health. Look for 2-5 grams of fiber per serving.

**WHOLE GRAINS**- breads, crackers, bagels, tortillas, bread sticks, English muffins, cereals, pasta, brown rice, corn meal and bran.

**VEGETABLES**-provide vitamin A, vitamin C folate, potassium and fiber. FRESH SEASONAL VEGATABLES- cherry tomatoes, celery, cucumber circles, colorful pepper strips, baby carrots, sugar snap peas, broccoli and cauliflower.

**FRUITS**-provide nutrients such as vitamin C, folate, potassium and fiber. FRESH SEASONAL FRUITS cantaloupe, watermelon, grapes, apples, oranges, bananas, plums, clementines, blueberries, strawberries, peaches, applesauce with natural sugar or low sugar fruit cups.

**DAIRY**- provides calcium, potassium, vitamin D, protein and other nutrients. Healthy bones and teeth! ORGANIC OR NATURAL if possible-all kinds of hard cheese, cream cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, low fat or fat free.

**PROTEINS**- provide vitamin B (niacin, thiamin, riboflavin and B6), vitamin E, iron and magnesium Tuna packed in water or olive oil, natural peanut or almond butter, nitrate, and hormone free meats.

## **FINANCIAL POLICY**

### **Annual Fees:**

A non-refundable annual registration and supply fee is due at time of registration.

### **Tuition Payments:**

Tuition payments are due on or before the first day of the month. A late payment fee of \$15.00 per child will be charged after the 10th of the month. Statements are sent on delinquent accounts after the 10th only. Children will not be able to attend school if a payment is delinquent by more than 30 days. If you have a problem paying the monthly tuition charge by the date requested, please discuss your situation with the Director. Parents can opt to pay the full year's tuition in advance. If you are paying with cash, be sure to get a receipt prior to leaving the office and please have the exact amount as the school does not have change. Invoices will be sent via email and electronic payment of monthly tuition is preferred. Credit card payments can made with a 3% fee added to all transactions; ACH transactions incur a 1% fee. We do not accept checks.

Families will be informed of any special collections which are sanctioned by the school, but optional, through written communication from the Director. Families who elect to participate in these events should pay monies to the school office. Elementary school families should never feel obligated to participate in purchasing group lunches, teacher gifts or similar collections. The choice to participate in these collections is at the individual discretion of each family.

### **Payment in Case of Withdrawal from Program:**

If a child is to be withdrawn from the school, a thirty-day written notice is required. If such notice is not given, one month's tuition beyond the withdrawal date will be billed. The only exception will be made for active duty military families who are relocated due to a change in military orders.

### **Financial Assistance:**

The School Board desires that all students be able to attend the Elementary school, regardless of their ability to pay the tuition fees. At this time, we plan to build a scholarship fund for future applicants with financial need. If you are in need of assistance, please contact the Pastor of First Presbyterian Church. All inquiries will be kept confidential.

### **Financial Needs of the School:**

First Presbyterian Elementary School is a non-profit school, which operates at the pleasure of the Governing Boards of First Presbyterian Church of El Paso. The Church graciously donates the space and utility requirements for the school. All salaries, security, maintenance, classroom supplies, and equipment are provided by the school tuition and annual fees. The fees collected do not cover the cost of a growing and improving school. We are in constant need of funds to expand our library, purchase new learning materials, obtain new outdoor equipment, and to initiate new programs needed to keep the school up-to-date. No gift is too small and all donations are tax deductible to the giver.

### **Ways to Donate May Include:**

OSBORNE TRUST SCHOLARSHIP FUND – Provides financial assistance for family hardships and for children who otherwise would not be able to attend.

TEACHER TRAINING FUND - Provides for quality elementary level education through workshops and seminars for our staff.

BIRTHDAY BOOK CLUB - All students and friends can donate a book to the Preschool in honor of their birthday.

SPECIAL WISH LIST - Special needs and requirements of the educational curriculum that are not met by our budget include playground maintenance and updated equipment, audio-visual equipment, software and computer equipment needed for the curriculum program, and various manipulatives for the classroom learning centers.

VOLUNTEERING - The school is always in need of volunteers! You may choose to help in the classroom, the office, the playground, at special functions, or become a board member. We are always in need of donations consisting of paper goods, snacks, art supplies, etc.

## **CURRICULUM**

Our child-centered, developmental curriculum is continuously renewed and adapted. We stay abreast of the latest research in elementary education both on a national and international level. We review and reform our curriculum after careful reflection on theory and practice, keeping in constant focus our unique community of learners.

The curriculum of First Presbyterian Elementary School is influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach to early education. The Reggio approach promotes key fundamental values relating to how children learn. These core values have been adapted to our school based on our culture, environment and the specific needs of our unique community. Our interpretation of the Reggio core values, as outlined in the summary of our curriculum below, continues to progress as our educational methods develop to connect the intellectual, spiritual, social, physical and emotional needs of each child we serve.

**The distinguishing features of our curriculum:** Each child is viewed as a strong, capable, resilient, curious citizen with great potential. Children arrive prepared with amazing skills! As educators we facilitate and support the revelation of these skills through our developmentally appropriate curriculum, from First to Sixth Grade. Inspired by their own interests, exploration and wonder, children have ample opportunities to become a successful community of learners.

The most recognizable feature of Reggio pedagogy is the use of the environment as the third educator, following parents and teachers. The center-based environments are rich with stimuli and related opportunities, contributing to the quality of experiences for both children and the adults involved in the school. The environments prompt communication and relationships thus inspiring an extraordinary social exchange.

In collaboration, the child, teacher and parents along with the community are all active in the learning process in an authentic way. Each “player” is a rich natural resource available to support the education of each child and one another. Through a very powerful

documentation process we are able to continuously detail an account of each child's learning journey. Teachers use an assortment of documentation methods resulting in a portfolio with artwork, photos, writing samples, progress reports, completed projects and quotes from the child.

Our curriculum offers opportunities for bilingual and multicultural experiences. In keeping with Reggio approach, and acknowledging our unique geographic and cultural context, we incorporate Spanish language and Mexican traditions into our daily programming. Students are exposed to the repetitive rudiments of the Spanish language through greetings, prayers, songs, books, stories, natural routines and new vocabulary. The benefits of dual language are directly related to higher brain development, flexible thinking skills, higher intelligence levels and cultural, racial and religious tolerance and understanding.

**Nine Virtuous Roots:** The roots of a tree connect it to the earth, hold it upright, and provide it with nourishment to grow. In the same way, our core values connect us to our communities, help us to make good choices, and provide nourishment for our spiritual and emotional growth. The nine virtues we emphasize at First Presbyterian Elementary School come from the Christian Bible, but have been embraced and practiced by people of good character in many traditions.

**Love** - Everyone is valuable, beautiful, important. We care about each other and we try to take care of each other.

**Joy** - We like to laugh, smile, and play. It's okay to be sad sometimes, but we look for happiness and try to share it.

**Peace** - We try to solve our problems in a way that works for everyone, respects everyone, and helps everyone.

**Patience** - Growing and learning take time. We wait for each other and we forgive each other, again and again and again.

**Kindness** - We are friendly and nice to everyone we meet, and try to treat other people the way we want to be treated.

**Goodness** - We do what's right, and try to see the best in the people and things around us.

**Faithfulness** - We keep our promises and our commitments, and try to tell the truth.

**Gentleness** - We are careful and thoughtful, and try not to cause any harm with our words or with our bodies.

**Self-Control** - We are responsible for decisions, and we try to think before we speak or act.

These virtues extend beyond the classroom and take root in the conversations, interactions, and decisions of our wider community-- parents, teachers and students alike. In this way, we are all connected, all nourished, all growing, teaching and learning together.

Music produces "beatful", "tuneful", and "artful" children. The ability to keep a steady beat is vital to language and motor development. The ability to match pitch creates an inner-voice, which is vital to intellectual development. And finally a shared experience that promotes healthy emotions, and builds a sense of beauty is the "art" part of music classes. In a society that seems increasingly disconnected and individualistic, music at our school emphasizes positive feelings and belonging.

Technology has a respected place in our curriculum as a tool that students, teachers and parents use collaboratively to discover new things and document the learning process.

Our outdoor environments truly unite us in collaboration with nature! The playground's intentional design encourages skill development in a variety of domains concurrently, resulting in whole-child learning and conducive spaces that our teachers and students will spend much of their day learning in. The natural beauty and serene atmosphere serves as an antidote to the sometimes frantic world of children.

### **Guidance/Counseling:**

First Presbyterian Elementary School is a vital part of First Presbyterian Church. The Pastoral staff of the Church is available to our families for guidance or counseling. Their doors are always open.

### **Guidance & Discipline:**

As part of our curriculum, teachers work to assist students in developing appropriate social skills as they build relationships. As student's social skills develop, conflicts may arise. When students demonstrate inappropriate behaviors or express emotion in an unhealthy way, teachers and administrators guide the child as he/she resolves the conflicts, identifies feelings, and discovers solutions. There is no one-size-fits-all response to inappropriate behavior and each situation will be given individual consideration and response, always demonstrating a healthy respect for the student and the community.

At all times, our goal is to guide students as they develop. Teachers and administrators will not use physical punishment such as shaking or hitting, use threats or derogatory remarks or withhold food from a student.

### **Assessment:**

Throughout the year, as the teacher plans the curriculum, he/she will use anecdotal observations, work samples, progress reports and feedback from families to help him/her plan activities that are appropriate for the children in his/her class. Each of these assessment tools provide the teacher with a clearer understanding of the individual abilities and needs of the children in his/her class.

In both informal and organized ways, teachers document how a child progresses throughout the school year. During parent/teacher conferences, teachers share this information about each child's milestone achievements with their family. To assist the teacher in developing the most appropriate curriculum for the students, he/she may share observations and progress reports with the school's administrator. Any assessment information is kept confidential in the child's file. In the event that individuals other than teaching staff, administrators or child's legal guardian desires access to assessment information, permission must be given by the parent/legal guardian before that information may be released.

**Important Information:**

You may contact the Texas Abuse/Neglect hotline at 1-800-252-5400 or at [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org).

It is a criminal offense to possess or consume alcoholic beverages on a public street, alley, or sidewalk within 1,000 feet of a facility that the person knows is a private school offering k-12 instruction. Texas Alcoholic Beverage Code §101.75.

Acts of hazing that occur on or off the campus of an educational institution, including a private high school, must be reported to the appropriate official of the institution. Texas Education Code §§37.151 and 37.152.

All illegal substances including smoking, tobacco and firearms are prohibited.