



**The  
Patchwork  
School**

## Family Handbook 2016-2017

This handbook is designed to give you information about the school's policies and practices. There is also a wealth of information on our website regarding our philosophy and inspirations. We hope you find both the handbook and website to be helpful, and please do not hesitate to contact us regarding any questions or concerns you might have. Our goal is to have open communication with parents to ensure the best possible experience for you, your children, and the community.

-The Patchwork Staff

## CONTENTS

[MISSION STATEMENT](#)

[NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY](#)

[DESCRIPTION](#)

[CONTACTING US](#)

[TEACHERS & STAFF](#)

[PROGRAMS](#)

[PAYMENTS, FEES & DISCOUNTS](#)

[ADMISSIONS AND REGISTRATION](#)

[HOLIDAYS, VACATIONS, SICK DAYS & CLOSURES](#)

[ILLNESSES](#)

[EMERGENCY & SECURITY](#)

[MEALS & SNACKS](#)

[DAILY LIFE](#)

[PARENT EDUCATION & INVOLVEMENT](#)

[SPECIAL NEEDS STATEMENT](#)

[SAFETY STATEMENT](#)

[RESOURCES](#)

## MISSION STATEMENT

PATCHWORK IS: RECREATING SCHOOL, SO CHILDREN AND ADULTS LEARN THROUGH MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE AS CITIZENS OF A DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY, ADVOCATING FREEDOM, RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPASSION.

## NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

To foster an equitable, nurturing, and stimulating environment for educational experiences and community building, The Patchwork School affirms that its students, staff, volunteers and guests have a right to be free from discrimination. We invite all people to participate in the activities, events and community of our school. We do not discriminate on any basis (cultural background, ethnicity, race, color, age, gender, sexual orientation, sex, disability, marital status or spirituality) in the administration of our care, instruction, admission, employment, or tuition assistance policies.

## DESCRIPTION

The Patchwork School is an innovative non-profit organization promoting children's rights and meaningful educational options for all, at the heart of which is a community-based democratic school for children ages one and up, located in Louisville, Colorado. By respecting children as people with ideas, interests and opinions, and by utilizing our community's resources, we have created an experiential learning environment that fosters critical thinking and problem solving, develops communication and leadership abilities, nurture's self-confidence and self-direction, promotes compassion and sustainability, and most of all preserves a passion for learning. Through the school, our parent education, teacher training, and community building, we advocate freedom, responsibility and compassion in community.

## CONTACTING US

- **Hours of Operation** – 8:00am-5:30pm, Monday through Friday
- **Phone** – During our Hours of Operation you will be able to reach us at: 720-271-6729. If we are unable to answer, please leave a message. Messages will be checked periodically throughout the day and calls will be returned as soon as possible.
- **Fax** – Our fax is 303-604-4365. You may use this to fax us any forms for registration.
- **Email** – The best way to reach us outside of our normal operating hours is by email. Please email scheduling and any concerns to [info@thepatchworkschool.com](mailto:info@thepatchworkschool.com). You may also email your child's teacher (*firstname@thepatchworkschool.com*) for specific questions relating to your child.

## TEACHERS & STAFF

- **Directors** – Michele Beach is the Executive Director with a Master's Degree in Educational Psychology, a teaching license for Early Childhood from the Colorado Department of Education, and a Director Qualification from the Colorado Department of Human Services. For more background and biographical information, please see the "Teachers & Staff" section of the website. For additional information on the Board of Directors, please see the "Board of Directors" section of the website.

- **Teachers** – All of our teachers have been chosen based on their commitment to the Patchwork philosophy, their previous experiences working with children, and their educational qualifications in the field of Early Childhood Education. You can read the teachers’ bios and qualifications on the website.
- **Training** – all teachers and interns are certified in CPR and First Aid as well as Universal Precautions. Teachers are also all provided with at least fifteen hours of professional development each year on topics related to education, philosophy, licensing and regulations, child development, etc.
- **Hiring** – all teaching and staff positions, including the position of Executive Director are re-evaluated by the staff and board each year. The staff and board must reach consensus each year on positions, salaries, hiring, promoting and any other staffing changes. All Staff members are required to have background checks, fingerprint checks and are checked against the National Sex Offender Registry.

## PROGRAMS

- **K-12** – The K-12 program is open to children ages 5 and up. There are a maximum of 30 children with three teachers, for a maximum student to teacher ratio of 1 to 10. Children may be enrolled for a minimum of two full-days and a maximum of five full-days. Any children enrolled for less than five full-days must be registered as homeschoolers through the school district.

**Preschool** – The Preschool program is open to children ages 3 to 6. There are a maximum of 28 students per day with 4 teachers for a student to teacher ratio of 1 to 7. Children may be enrolled for a minimum of two half-days and a maximum of five full-days. Please note that children are not required to be potty-trained for any program.

- **Toddlers** – The Toddler program is open to children ages 1 to 3 who are able to walk or get around on their own well. There is one group of 10 children with two teachers for a student to teacher ratio of 1 to 5. Children may be enrolled for a minimum of two half-days.

## PAYMENTS, FEES & DISCOUNTS

- **Registration** – There is a \$225 registration fee per child each year. The registration fee is non-refundable.
- **Tuition** – Tuition for all programs, except Summer programs, is calculated for the entire year and then can be paid in full or in monthly payments. One trimester (three months) must be paid upfront and then monthly payments can be made if preferred. Tuition must be pre-paid and is **non-refundable and non-transferable**. Please see the website for tuition rates. The first trimester’s tuition will be pro-rated if the child is registered after the trimester begins.
- **Parent Education Fee** – There is a Parent Education Fee of \$300, which is a one-time fee per family. The fee will covers all parents/guardians in the family for our community days and workshops. If you are receiving tuition assistance please check with us regarding fee waiver options.
- **Sibling Discounts** – Any siblings (after the first child is enrolled) will receive a 5% discount on Tuition (this discount does not apply to the registration fee or before/after care). The sibling discounts will be applied to the children with the lowest total tuition rates.
- **Drop-In** – The rate for drop-ins is hourly, at \$11.50/hour for the Preschool Program, at \$13/hour for the Toddler program, and at \$12.50/hour for the K-12 Program. Payment will be required on or before the drop-in date, or will be billed to you. Siblings who aren’t enrolled may drop in on a case-by-case basis, but will need to have all paperwork completed prior to first visit.
- **Payments** – Payments may be made in cash or check payable to The Patchwork School, or by credit card or e-check through the online registration system.

- **Returned Checks** – The returned check fee is \$25.00.
- **Late Fee** – If payment is received after the due date a \$25.00 late payment fee will be assessed.
- **Overtime Fee** – After a ten minute grace period, any late pickups will be charged \$10.00 for every ten minutes (or any portion thereof).
- **Tuition Increases** – Our goal is to keep tuition increases between 2-4% per year in order to cover cost-of-living raises for teachers and other rent and utility increases, while avoiding any large jumps in tuition which might be a strain on families.
- **Schedule Changes** – Parents may choose to change their child’s schedule at each trimester, provided that the requested days & hours are available. We will not make any schedule changes or refunds mid-trimester, unless you would like to add a new day, add an afternoon, or add new after care, and we have openings for the requested addition. Additions mid-trimester will be pro-rated.
- **Explanation of Trimester Commitment** - Unlike many child-care centers, our staff are not scheduled by the month or day, but are paid annual salaries, and are expected to attend weekly staff meetings and regular professional development trainings. What this means is that our teachers are committed to being here, and this is why we ask for at least a trimester commitment from you. Ideally we would like for families to commit and pay for an entire year upfront since that is what we ask of staff, however we understand that life changes occur, so our trimester scheduling is our compromise. We hope this helps you to understand why we are thus unable to do mid-trimester refunds and changes.

## ADMISSIONS AND REGISTRATION

- **Registration Forms** – All registration and authorization forms must be received via the online registration system prior to the child’s first day.
- **Student Photo** – Please submit a digital photo of your child (to [info@thepatchworkschool.com](mailto:info@thepatchworkschool.com) or via the registration system) prior to August 15<sup>th</sup> for use on cubbies and other personal items.
- **Health Status Forms** – Health Status forms must be filled out by a physician who has seen your child for a well visit within the last year. The Health Status form must be received within 30 days of the first day of school. Health forms will also need to be updated at each well child doctor visit.
- **Immunizations** – Please have the certificate of immunization filled out by your child’s physician, along with the Health Status Form. If you choose not to have your child immunized because of medical, religious, or personal reasons, please sign the appropriate section of the form. This must be returned on the provided form prior to your child’s first day.
- **Asthma Forms** – If your child has Asthma, you will need an additional form signed by your physician (this can be our form or theirs). If they require an inhaler, it will need to be provided in the original packaging (with prescription label). We will also need the dosage and doctor’s directions either on the Asthma form or separate.
- **Allergy Forms** – If your child has any severe allergies requiring medication, you will need an additional form signed by your physician (again this can be our form or theirs). Any prescribed medication needs to be provided in the original packaging (with prescription label). Medication name and droppers must match the prescription exactly (ex. If prescription states “Benadryl” we cannot accept generic, or if prescription states “1 tsp” we cannot take a dropper with only mL).
- **Student Information Changes** – Whenever anything from the student information form changes, please be sure to let us know as soon as possible. It is important for us to have current medical, pick-up, and contact information.
- **Photos/Images** – We do use pictures and videos throughout each day to document the learning taking place so that we can share it with the children, with parents and so we can reflect on it as teachers.

This means we do need each family to sign our “Image Release” form. Images of children will always be used with first names only and will always be displayed in a manner that is respectful of the child. We ask that families please ensure that any photos shared with you digitally are kept for your own personal use and not shared further, especially if other children are in the picture.

- **Special Needs** – For any child with a disability, defined by the ADA as a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,” we will make all “readily achievable accommodations” possible, in accordance with the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act. Therefore, children will be accepted on a case by case basis. Children with disabilities will be fully integrated into the school’s regular activities. Teachers will work with parents to determine if and how the school can meet the child’s needs. The school may also offer various screenings which parents may take advantage of if they choose. Children with special needs may require additional health care plans which will be reviewed by the school nurse. Please see more information regarding Special Needs in our Special Needs Statement near the end of this handbook.
- **Diagnosing Disabilities** – As is mentioned in our Special Needs Statement, we are not in the business of trying to “label” or diagnose children, and we do not perform any screenings to determine social, emotional, behavioral, learning or any other such disabilities. As teachers make observations of your child, these will certainly be shared with you, and we may at times recommend that you look into additional outside support, screenings or therapeutic programs based on our knowledge and expertise in child development and our relationship with your child. However, we do not accept responsibility for or make any guarantee that teachers will always notice or be aware of a particular challenge that might typically be given a label or diagnosis.
- **Kindergarten Readiness** – Our philosophy is to be a social, emotional and academic support for children and families rather than “covering” a specific curriculum. Despite not seeking “kindergarten readiness” as a goal in and of itself, we do find that children are generally very well prepared for environments they will enter into after Patchwork, having practiced communication skills, self-awareness and responsibility and they are able to adapt and catch on quickly. Please let us know if you have concerns about this and/or would like support in helping you child prepare to transition to Kindergarten or any other place you may be headed next.
- **Exceptional Schedules** – For an "exceptional" schedule request, or for children with "special needs" or particularly challenging behaviors, if a schedule change is requested, or if the child is new, then if we have space we will do a two-week trial period for the special or new schedule, unless there is a clear reason for why we might not be able to meet the child's needs (ex. space not wheelchair accessible). After that point our executive committee will seek feedback from the staff and board (if necessary), and will consider all information to make a decision on whether the schedule should remain as is, or if a meeting with the family is needed to discuss suggested changes. The meeting with the family will include 1-2 teachers that work with the child, and the parents/guardians. The goal of the meeting should be to come to consensus on how to proceed given the recommendations from the staff and the desires of the family. If consensus absolutely cannot be reached, the decision will rest with the board of directors.
- **Withdrawals** – We ask that families give us as much notice as possible before withdrawing their child from school as it is helpful for all parties to be able to find closure and say goodbye. We do not offer any refunds of tuition. If tuition is not paid by the required date, we will have to assume that the child is being withdrawn and will offer their space to another family. The Patchwork School does not anticipate any scenarios under which an eligible student would be refused service – we hope to work with families to ensure that teacher, parent and child are all in agreement regarding the child’s needs. However, in

the unlikely event that we are unable to reach consensus with a family regarding any issues that may arise, the child will be dis-enrolled with no refund.

## HOLIDAYS, VACATIONS, SICK DAYS & CLOSURES

- **School Holidays** – Please see the school calendar for closure dates.
- **Student Vacation/Sick Day** – Families will not be refunded for school days (or After Hours Care) missed for family vacations or student illness. Please notify us as soon as possible if your child will be missing one of their regularly scheduled days.
- **Extended Absences** – In some cases, if a student will be missing four or more consecutive weeks of school due to health, travel or otherwise, upon request and approval by the staff, the family may receive up to half of the missed time in drop-in credit, to be used within the same school year (it will not roll over to summer or future years). The drop-in credit can only be used as space is available. This will allow families some flexibility with extended absences, while also supporting the family and the school in holding the student's space.
- **School Closures** – The Patchwork School will be closed on all days for which the Boulder Valley School District declares a school closure (this could be for snow or other emergencies). There is always a chance that we will need to close the school for some other reason. In such a case (such as a natural disaster), parents will need to call the school office (720-271-6729) to reach an automated message that will contain updates about school closures. Feel free to call any morning to verify that school will be open. Again, no tuition will be refunded for any school closures.

## ILLNESSES

- **Sick Children** – If your child appears to be too uncomfortable to participate, or seems to have an illness that could be contagious, we will ask that you keep your child at home. If they become sick while at school, we will call you to pick them up. We request that you keep your child at home until they are symptom free and/or on antibiotics for 24 hours before returning to school. If you are working, please be sure to plan for alternate care for your child when they become sick, as illnesses do occur more often in group situations.
- **Medication** – Any prescriptive or non-prescriptive medication can be administered by faculty members only with written authority from a physician AND written parental consent. You may use the form provided (available in the office) or any equivalent alternative. Epinephrine or inhaled/nebulized medication must also be accompanied by a written protocol (See “Allergy Forms” above). Please provide the medication in its original container with pharmacy label (if applicable) and labeled with your child's first and last name. Medication will be stored in a child-proof area and administered only by a teacher that has been delegated with medication administration from the Nurse Consultant in compliance with the “Nurse Practice Act.” All students with diabetes, seizures, severe allergies or asthma must have a Health Care Plan on file.
- **Lotions/Creams** – Topical preparations provided by parents, including diaper creams, lotion and bug sprays can be administered with written parental consent as long as they are not applied to open wounds or broken skin.
- **Contagious Illnesses** – Please report any contagious illnesses (including pink eye, strep, chicken pox, measles, mumps, hepatitis, etc.) to a director as soon as possible so that we may alert other families. Your child's name will be kept confidential. Certain illnesses and accidents must be reported to the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care. We abide by the Colorado

Department of Public Health and Environment guidelines for infectious disease control in childcare and school settings, which can change at times to ensure the health of our community.

- **Cuts/Scrapes** – Due to licensing regulations, we are not permitted to apply antibacterial ointments or remove splinters. The mandated treatment of minor cuts and abrasions is to wash thoroughly with soap and water and apply a bandage. Such an injury will be communicated to parents with a “Bandaid Receipt.”

## EMERGENCY & SECURITY

- **Pick-up** – Children will only be released to the adults for whom written authorization has been given. In an emergency, the child may be released to an adult for whom the child’s parent or guardian has given verbal authorization. If the caregiver doesn’t know the adult, identification must be required to assure the adult is authorized to pick up the child. The last teacher to leave the school each day will be responsible for using the sign-in sheets to verify that all children have been signed out. If for some reason a child is not picked-up at the end of the day, the teacher will attempt to contact the parent, guardian, and or emergency contacts until someone is reached that can pick the child up. If no authorized person is located after two hours, the teacher or director will notify the Police and/or Social Services. Overtime fees will apply. Please note that if a teacher senses that a child is genuinely uncomfortable about leaving with an authorized person, the child will not be forced to leave. Another parent or guardian will be contacted to come and pick the child up.
- **Contacting Parents** – In the event of an emergency, our first priority is to attend to the child(ren). Emergency services will then be called if necessary, after which parents will immediately be contacted. If we are unable to contact you, we will contact the emergency contact listed on your Student Information Form.
- **Contacting School** – If parents should ever need to contact the school, they should call the school phone number. If we are not able to answer, please leave a message. Messages will be checked periodically throughout the day and calls will be returned as soon as possible.
- **Door Code** – There is a security keypad on the door through which you will normally be entering and exiting. You will be informed of the code on your first day of school. Please be sure not to give the code out any more than is necessary. If you feel the code has been compromised, please let us know so that we may change it.
- **Emergencies** – If an emergency situation (such as a tornado warning, blizzard warning, fire, etc.) were to occur while your child is at school, you will be notified as soon as possible. You will be directed as to how and where you can pick up your child. Teachers will remain with the children until they are all picked up. Certain incidents will be reported to the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care, as required.

**Lost Child Emergency Procedure** — In the event that a child cannot be located, faculty will begin by searching the immediate area. A director will be notified, as well as all other faculty as they are encountered. A faculty member will be assigned to stand watch at the front gate, and other faculty members will be assigned to each area of the school. If the child cannot be found within 5 minutes, 911 will be called and parents/guardians will be notified as soon as possible.

## MEALS & SNACKS

- **Snacks** – We offer a morning and afternoon snack time. These will occur roughly at 10am and 2:30pm, but times will vary according to the children’s needs and the various programs. Snacks are provided by parents and request that you try to meet the needs of the special dietary restrictions for



your child's program, as well as keeping sugar to a minimum. Please contact your child's teachers to find out how to sign up.

- **Lunches** – Children will need to bring a lunch with them every day for which they are in attendance at lunch time. Please be aware that children will not be able to share any food from their lunch with any other child (including a sibling) due primarily to allergy concerns. We are not able to heat food up and we recommend including ice packs in lunches, as we are not able to store any lunch items in the refrigerator.
- **Dietary Restrictions** – We will do our best to work with you to ensure that all of the children's dietary needs are met, despite any restrictions you or they may have. However, if a child requires food that significantly differs from the menu for the rest of the children, we ask that parents either bring food or provide reimbursement for special items.
- **No Nuts** – We are a nut-free school, so no foods containing peanuts, tree-nuts, or other nut products may be brought into the school. At least one of our students has a severe, life-threatening allergy to nuts and thus it is critical to avoid any contact with this food. Please help us in reading labels before packing any foods for school – especially muffins, granola bars, cereals, etc. to check for “hidden” ingredients. If your child has eaten nut products before coming to school, please be sure his or her hands and face have been thoroughly washed before entering the building. Please note that Sunflower Butter and Soy Butter are both excellent alternatives to nut butters.
- **Milk/Drinks** – Please bring a water bottle or cup labeled with your child's name so that they have access to it throughout the day. No juice or other drinks will be served except possibly for special celebrations. No milk will be provided, so if desired please provide in a leak-proof container in your child's lunch box with ice pack. Please make sure that all drink containers are taken home each day to be washed (or for water bottles, at the end of the week).
- **Treats/Special Occasions** – For birthdays and other special occasions, we are happy to have parents bring in special foods. Please check with a teacher to find out about any allergies or other dietary restrictions of children that will be attending that day, and please bring a list of ingredients for anything home-made. Again, please try to keep sugar to a minimum.

## DAILY LIFE

- **Drop-Off/Parking** – We understand that it can be very difficult to get young children to and from places on time because they don't really think of time in the same way that adults do. Therefore, we would like to encourage parents to drop children off anywhere between 8:50 & 9:20, or between 8:00 and 8:15 for morning care. Having staggered drop-offs allows us to welcome each child individually as they arrive, and helps parking to go more smoothly. Please do make sure that you park only in the spaces directly in front of the school. Please do not park in front of the businesses to the north or the south of the school or in the middle school parking lot. If you are visiting the school for any reason besides just dropping off or picking up or expect to stay longer than about 10 minutes please use alternate parking in front of a nearby residence (not business) or along Griffith street to the south in order to keep the traffic in front of the school moving smoothly. If you arrive during meeting or any other group activity, please remain with your child until the gathering is over to keep disruptions to a minimum.
- **Sign-in/Pick-up** – Please be sure to fill out all information on the sign-in and pick-up sheet. This will help us to ensure that your child is picked-up only by those persons authorized by you on the Student Information Form. Teachers will also use the sign-in sheets throughout the day to confirm that all children that are signed in are accounted for. Please be sure to pick children up early or on time (there is a ten minute grace period after which overtime charges will apply). Keep in mind that children will

sometimes be engaged in an activity at pick-up time, so plan enough time to help them transition, change out of any wet or messy clothes, and gather their belongings.

- **Visits** – Parents and families are always welcome. Anyone else that would like to visit your child may also do so (grandparents, etc.) with your permission. Please let us know when they will be coming and ensure that they are prepared to show identification and sign-in upon arriving.
- **Television** – There will be no TV watching at school. Teachers may occasionally show the children a short educational video or clips from the Internet pertaining to something we are studying.
- **Computers** – Computers will be used with teacher supervision throughout the day for the purposes of research, communication, and expression. Computers are used for research only, not for entertainment, meaning no video games or movies.
- **Celebrations, Traditions & Religion** – We would welcome your help in celebrating your child's birthday or any other family holidays. Please let us know about any traditions you would like to share, and see the "Treats/Special Occasions" section above for information about bringing food. We do not have any religious affiliation and do not teach any religious curriculum. Should a student ask a question about religion, politics, or any other potentially controversial topic, we will support them in seeking out their own answers, being careful to help them find accurate information.
- **Walks** – We will occasionally take walks with the children to nearby locations. Please ensure you have given permission on the Student Information Form. Walks will likely be to the park, library, or other neighborhood facilities.
- **Toddler and Preschool Field Trips** – Parents will be notified of plans for any field trips requiring vehicular transportation. Transportation will be arranged by recruiting parent volunteers. We would appreciate your help in volunteering, and may request small fees if appropriate. All children requiring car seats or booster seats will need to have their seats dropped off with them in the morning. All children will always be required to remain seated and securely fastened in the vehicles, and no parent or teacher will be responsible for driving and/or supervising more than four children at one time. All chaperones must carry a cell phone at all times so that they may immediately call 911 in an emergency. All chaperones will be provided with instructions as well as emergency contact information for the directors, teachers, and the children. Should a child arrive after a small-group field trip has departed they will be allowed to join an alternate group. If a child arrives after an all-school field-trip, the parents will be required to bring the child to the field trip location and will not be able to leave the child at the school. If you do help drive, please be sure you are properly insured and provide us with a copy of your insurance card.
- **K-12 Field Trips** – For the older students, parents will be notified of plans for any major field trips requiring vehicular transportation. However, short trips may occur spontaneously if the teacher vehicles are sufficient for transporting all of the teachers and children participating in the trip. For pre-planned trips, transportation will be arranged by recruiting parent volunteers. We would appreciate your help in volunteering, and may request small fees if appropriate. All children requiring car seats or booster seats will need to have their seats dropped off with them in the morning. All children will always be required to remain seated and securely fastened in the vehicles. All chaperones must carry a cell phone at all times so that they may immediately call 911 in an emergency. All chaperones will be provided with instructions as well as emergency contact information for the directors, teachers, and the children. Should a child arrive after a small-group field trip has departed they will be allowed to join an alternate group. If a child arrives after an all-school field-trip, the parents will be required to bring the child to the field trip location and will not be able to leave the child at the school. If you do help drive, please be sure you are properly insured and provide us with a copy of your insurance card.

- **Outside** – We will ensure that children have an opportunity to be outside at least once a day when weather is permitting. Please be sure to bring clothing that is appropriate for the weather (including snow pants and boots when necessary). We will apply sunscreen to any child who remains outside in direct sunlight for more than ten minutes. We will provide sunscreen, but you are also welcome to provide your own (please label). We appreciate you bringing your child wearing sunscreen during the warmer months.
- **Naps & Still Time** – All children staying in the afternoon will be provided with an opportunity to rest and/or sleep after lunch or whenever they appear to need it. Nap mats with individual sheets will be available and children are encouraged to bring any blankets or comfort items that might help them to sleep. Due to licensing requirements, we are not permitted to wake sleeping children.
- **Diapering/Toilet Learning** – We ask that you provide any diapers or pull-ups that your child may require (cloth or disposable), along with a container of diaper wipes. If your child is toilet learning, please be sure to let us know so that we may be consistent at school (although we will not be able to offer any rewards). We do not require that children be “potty-trained” by any particular age. Children will be encouraged to use the toilet, but will never be pressured to do so. During toilet learning, it is a good idea to provide multiple changes of clothing, as accidents will happen.
- **Clothing Limits** – If children are hot, messy, or doing water play at school, we will offer that they can wear a swimsuit (inside or outside and weather permitting). If they do not have a swim suit, children in the Preschool or Toddler programs may be permitted to wear just a diaper or other appropriate clothing. Children in the K-12 program must always be wearing something more than underwear, but are also welcome to wear swimwear (weather permitting). Our general rule is that children must be clothed in something that would be appropriate wear for a public park.
- **Body Exploration** - It is natural that as a part of learning about the world, children will be curious about their own and others’ bodies. We respond to developmentally appropriate anatomy explorations without judgement and utilize appropriate and correct body vocabulary while redirecting behavior to appropriate activities for a school setting. We ask open ended questions to further understand the child’s curiosities and answer children honestly, with only as much information as is needed. We will also let parents know of any instances of a child exploring their body at school so that we can work together to respond with understanding to the child’s natural curiosity. All staff members are trained (and we offer training to Parents periodically) to respond to children’s questions and explorations about their bodies supportively with active listening. Staff members are mandated reporters of abuse and will always follow up on anything outside the norm.
- **Healthy Living & Breastfeeding** - In accordance with Boulder County Health Department’s “Healthy Eating, Active Living” (HEAL) recommendations for Caregivers, we abide by the following guidelines: We encourage families to bring healthy lunches with a variety of protein, fruits and vegetables and limited sugar, we never use food as a reward, we do not offer any sugary drinks, we ask that sugar is limited even for celebrations, we ensure that a significant amount of active movement opportunities are available every day, and we have no “recreational” screen time. In addition, we support breastfeeding by offering spaces for breastfeeding, offering space in the refrigerator for breastmilk, and regularly conferring with families about their needs.
- **Items From Home** – It is important to the philosophy that we maintain an environment full of open-ended materials that meet our criteria for promoting social justice, creativity and critical thinking in play, and are communally shared. Therefore, we would like you to help us in holding the following limits. Items may only be brought from home if they fall into one of the following categories:
  - o They are a special comfort/love item that can be kept in the cubby for nap time or sad moments.

- o It is something to be shared with the group at meeting and then put away.
- o It is part of what the child is wearing for the day (such as a costume, but not costume accessories).
- o It is for a pre-arranged offering for the day, to be shared with everyone (please speak to a teacher about how to arrange this kind of thing (for example, a child may want to share a game).
- **Supplies/Belongings** – Your child’s personal belongings will be kept in a cubby at school. Because some project work will be messy, please be sure that your child is dressed appropriately and that they have a change of clothing available. Please help children take home items they are done with to keep the cubby accessible. The following items should be available at all times:
  - o Extra clothing
  - o Diapers or Pull-ups (if applicable)
  - o Sippy Cups and/or water bottles
  - o Coats, boots, mittens, hats, slippers, etc.
  - o Blanket or other comfort items (if applicable)
  - o Swimsuit & towel (during the summer)

See the attached school supply lists for details on what school supplies to provide.

**PLEASE LABEL ALL PERSONAL ITEMS (see our website for a labeling company)**

- **Communications** – We strongly encourage parent involvement, and will make every effort to keep communication open and ongoing. Please be sure to speak with one of us whenever you have a question, idea, comment, or concern. We will also be communicating with parents daily at drop-off and pick-up, regularly through notes in parent mailboxes and documentation in the school, and monthly through newsletters. We will also offer “Learning Dialogues” between teachers and parents at regularly scheduled intervals, and can meet beyond that as needed.
- **Comments/Concerns** – We encourage parents to attend our parent meetings to voice any comments, concerns or feedback. If you are unable to attend, please feel free to contact any staff or board member.
- **Family Participation** – Besides regular communication, we hope that parents will be frequent participants in the daily lives of the school. We offer numerous ways for parents to volunteer, and various resources to help support you. Please see the “Parents” section of the website for additional information and the “Parent Education” statement at the end of this handbook.
- **Adjustment Period** – Children all respond differently to change. Some will be excited about trying something new, some will be nervous, and most will have both feelings at different times. It is normal for your child to cry when you leave, but it is also normal for them not to miss you at all. It is also normal for them to be anxious for the first few weeks and then fine, but it is also normal for them to be excited at first and then have a few weeks where it is more difficult to say goodbye. Keep in mind that the anxiety about saying goodbye is usually the most difficult part. Once the parent leaves, children are almost always fine within minutes. We will work with each family to find a drop-off routine that works well for both the parent and the child. Also, please know that if a child is truly having a difficult time adjusting, and doesn’t seem to feel better shortly after you leave, we will absolutely let you know so that we can work together to find a solution.
- **Conflict Resolution** – In order to support the children in conflict resolution, we use strategies found in democratic learning communities, specifically adhering to a restorative justice approach. Our stance on conflict resolution is heavily influenced by our belief in an education based on relationships within the learning community. This means that we will not use any treats or rewards, or punishments such as time-out. Rather than developing morals, punishments and rewards merely keep children obedient. Autonomy and self-regulation is encouraged by validating, listening and allowing children to

construct their own understanding. At times we must contain children/behavior, but rather than using unrelated punishments, we help hold necessary limits as children infringe upon the rights of others in the community or break agreements. We view conflicts, either with the environment or with others, as opportunities for learning rather than something to be summarily extinguished. In this approach, the teacher appreciates all perspectives and works to create an inclusive community. In addition, the teacher begins with an image of the child as successful and capable of working through problems within a group. The teachers are committed to honest communication through questions and conversation. Thus the teacher's role is to observe, scaffold, and mediate as conflicts arise. Each year we host numerous Communication Workshops to discuss strategies used at school, useful language, and ideas that can be used at home. Consistency in language and conflict resolution methods can further strengthen the connection between home and school.

## PARENT EDUCATION & INVOLVEMENT

We are so fortunate to have such wonderful, involved parents, and we know that you understand how important your involvement is to your child and to the school. We like to think of it as "enrolling the whole family!" In order to create the type of community and school that we all want for our children and ourselves, we provide opportunities to hear everyone's voices, and means of participation that are exciting and available to everyone:

**Community Days** – On the Second Sunday on each month we offer a community day where parents, staff and community members can come together to experience the Patchwork approach. We will have offerings for families, children, adults, and you can also bring your own offering or idea to share. Some offerings have been: Communication Workshops (see below), Parent Input Meetings (see below), Free Massage, Gingerbread houses, knitting circles, etc.

**Parent Input Meetings** - We have a Board of Directors made up of parents, staff and community members that meets regularly, using a consensus model just as we do with the staff and with the children. All parents are invited to apply to be on this board. In addition, we host various parent meetings where everyone can hear updates about what is happening with the school, to meet other parents, and to make decisions about or bring up items of importance to you.

**Communication Skills Workshops** – We offer various communication skills workshops throughout the year which allows parents to really delve deeply into Listening techniques, Non-Violent Communication, and other parenting topics that you may bring up. This helps you to learn and practice the techniques used here at school and to support one another as parents dealing with many of the same issues.

**Classroom Participation** – We understand that parents are very busy people, whether you have a job outside the home or not. However, we know that you do also want to play a role in your child's education, which is probably one of the reasons you have chosen Patchwork. Our hope is that every parent or guardian will make time to spend a morning at the school and/or find another way to contribute outside of school hours (whether this is joining a committee, participating in a work-day, or helping with an event).

## SPECIAL NEEDS STATEMENT

At The Patchwork School, we believe that every child has their own unique strengths and their own challenges, and we strive to get to know each child as a person so that we can support him or her in

the best way possible. Thus, we do not really think of a child with "Special Needs" any differently than any other child, but instead prefer to treat every case uniquely. We do also understand that some children will require additional support in order to accomplish tasks that may come more easily for a "typically developing" child. This could be a physical, learning, emotional, social, or behavioral challenge. We understand that certain challenges can make participation in various activities especially difficult. We strive not to "label" children, but to find strategies and resources that can help us to be properly equipped to meet the child's needs. We try to view any special challenges as opportunities for learning -- both for the child and the community. At times other children (and teachers) may need help learning how to work with a particular student which ultimately helps everyone learn how to be in community with (not just tolerant of) people that are different.

We also know that we must be realistic in our abilities to meet every child's needs and thus will evaluate each situation with regards to how well we can support the child, what effect that child may have on the other children, what strain any extra support needed will place on the teachers and other staff, and what the effect will be on the community as a whole. Working with a child that requires extra support can be both time consuming and stressful, and it is important for everyone involved that we not take on more than we can truly handle well.

Therefore, we will try to carefully evaluate whether or not we believe we currently have the resources available to accept a new child with Special Needs. After enrollment, we will work with each individual family on a periodic or as needed basis to share observations, set goals, and discuss any necessary adjustments. Adjustments may include requesting that the family provide extra support people, special trainings for staff, access to necessary professionals, schedule changes, research or other data, etc.

We will work with the family to ensure that we have consensus on the plan for meeting their child's needs and that everyone is working together to support one another.

## SAFETY STATEMENT

We frequently get questions from parents about safety, including security, abuse policies, hitting, and other related topics. This is to be expected, given the weight of the decision that you are having to make. We understand that trying to determine who you want to place your trust in, when it comes to your child's well-being is not an easy matter. Therefore, we would like to let you know our philosophy regarding the topic of safety. First, the safety of your children is of the utmost importance to us. If children are not safe, then we are not meeting the most basic and necessary goal of our school. However, given that it is not always entirely clear what "safe" means, we want to define it more completely. To start with, we want to ensure that children **feel safe** when they are here, that they are kept **safe from serious injury**, and that their **social and emotional well being** is nurtured and protected. To this end, we adhere to all required safety measures, starting with background checks and fingerprinting as well as checking the National Sex Offender Registry for every teacher. We are licensed by the Colorado Department of Human Services, have inspections by the Boulder County Health Department, and get fire inspections from the Louisville Fire Department.

We also strive to build solid relationships between teachers, parents, and the children. Strong, open relationships are our best defense against the undesirable aspects of the world. As we work with parents, and we encourage them to become a part of the community, we get to know each person individually, so that we know when someone new walks in the door, and we know who we can really

depend on. As for teachers, we do not just interview them and hire them based on a resume. Instead, we ask them to spend some time in the school alongside a current staff member, allowing us to get to know them first. We even have out-of-town interviewees stay at our houses. Then, as a staff, we regularly have open and frank conversations and trainings about risks, concerns, safety, body and sex education and more. We have a community contract welcoming any member of the community to raise a concern, knowing that all issues are open for discussion. We also have a co-teaching environment that in a very natural way, ensures that teachers are not working alone, but are handling problems as a team. We have created a close-knit community rather than a collection of strangers.

In addition, we also believe that with the responsibility of the protection of children, comes a **responsibility for the protection of their rights**. Besides asking us to watch over your child, you are also charging us with ensuring that your child has the right to participate, the right to speak their mind, and the right to the pursuit of happiness. This responsibility is no less important to us, and in fact must even be more present in our minds, as society is often quick to punish for failing to protect, but rarely recognizes failures to allow. Thus, we seek to **balance the need for protection and participation** in such a way that honors adults' concerns and fears about safety, but at the same time also honors the child's need to take reasonable risks, to explore their world freely, and to experience success and failure first-hand.

We understand that parents are constantly bombarded with books, media, workshops, TV programs, and more, insisting that your child's safety and wellbeing depends on your adherence to a specific set of safety guidelines. We also live in a world where parents are blamed, and even persecuted, when any ill befalls their child. "Assertive advocacy groups, ambitious politicians, and sensationalistic media promote unrealistic fears... Real risks exist, but they are often far less than adults believe. Even when school shootings seemed to occur everywhere, Americans faced a far greater risk of being struck by lightning than falling to school violence" (Rudkin, Hall, 2010). Thus, we feel that any media that aims to counsel parents on how to keep their children "safe" should be considered carefully and utilized as provocation for discussion, but that we must be careful not to allow ourselves to be taken in by frightening statistics.

We believe it is important to ensure that children have opportunities to take risks. It is beneficial for them to experience the normal bumps and bruises that accompany a true and authentic experience, so that they have a chance to learn first-hand what the consequences of their actions are. Therefore, we want to create a space that is "...as safe as necessary rather than as safe as possible" (Rudkin, Hall, 2010). This allows the children to experience small risks in a safe environment where they are supported as they experience and learn to handle pain, disappointment, and conflict, as well as excitement, friendship, and joy. We work to empower children to say "no" to anything they don't like, to seek help when they need it, and to stand up for one another. **Our goal is to look to our children, our surroundings, and our community to make accurate assessments of the true risks at hand as we work together to protect the physical and emotional well-being, as well as the rights, of the children (and the adults) in our community.**

If you have additional specific questions about security, safety, or anything else, we are of course more than happy to talk with you in person, or on the phone. We also recommend the following resources, which echo our ideas about how we can approach the topic of children's safety, and from which we have drawn upon to compose the above statement:





## RESOURCES

Rudkin, J., Hall, E. (2010). *Seen and Heard: Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education*.

Skenazy, L. (2009). *Free-Range Kids: How to Raise Self-Reliant Children (Without Going Nuts With Worry)*

Bronson, P., Merryman, A. (2011). *Nurture Shock: New Thinking About Children*

Faber, A, Mazlish, E. (1999). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*

Berkower, LCSW, Child Abuse Prevention Specialist/Educator. (2014). *ParentingSafeChildren: Keeping Children safe from sexual abuse--in your community*.

- **Colorado Department of Human Services** – The Patchwork School is licensed by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care, 1575 Sherman Street, Denver Colorado 80203-1714 (303-866-5958). This department is responsible for issuing and renewing licenses for child care facilities and handles all questions, concerns, violations, and complaints.
- **Boulder County Family and Children's Services** – The Boulder County Department of Social Services handles reports of suspected abuse or neglect via a 24-hour telephone service (303-678-6247). We are required by law to report all suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.