



Environmental  
Education Center

# Family Handbook 2024

## **Sturgeon City Environment Education Center Mission, Vision, and Core Values**

### Mission Statement

At Sturgeon City, our mission is to champion environmental and STEAM education, shaping the future by nurturing leaders and stewards of both the environment and the sciences. Through interactive programs and community engagement, we empower individuals to safeguard our planet and cultivate an enduring dedication to sustainability while fostering innovation and creativity in STEAM disciplines.

### Vision Statement

Our vision embraces a future where Sturgeon City's environmental and STEAM education sparks transformative change. We foresee vibrant communities guided by individuals who are not just passionate environmental stewards but also innovative thinkers in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics. We aim for a world with a robust link between environmental responsibility and STEAM excellence, nurturing leaders who protect our planet and pioneer global solutions.

### Core Values:

1. Educational Excellence and Innovation: Focusing on providing top-tier environmental and STEAM education while fostering a culture of curiosity and innovation.
2. Environmental Stewardship: Prioritizing the protection and preservation of the environment while nurturing a deep respect for the natural world.
3. Empowerment and Leadership Development: Empowering individuals to become leaders and agents of change, both in environmental conservation and within STEAM disciplines.
4. Community Collaboration and Inclusion: Actively engaging the community, promoting diversity and inclusion to inspire, support, and collaborate in achieving the organization's mission and vision.

### **Contact Information**

Sturgeon City Environmental Education Center

Physical Address: 50 Court St, Building 100, Jacksonville, NC 28540

Mailing Address: PO Box 1056, Jacksonville, NC 28541

Office Phone: 910-750-5876

Email: [Info@SturgeonCity.org](mailto:Info@SturgeonCity.org)

Lisa Murabito, Executive Director: [Director@SturgeonCity.org](mailto:Director@SturgeonCity.org)

Jamie McIntire, Program and Events Manager: [Programming@SturgeonCity.org](mailto:Programming@SturgeonCity.org)

## **Registration**

***Pre-registration is required for all programs.***

**Spring Break Camp or Summer Camp:** Payment for Spring Break Camp or Summer Camp must be made in full by the close of business on the Monday one week prior to the registered camp's start date. Failure to make the full payment will result in the camper being removed from the roster, and their space will be made available to new registrants. Registrations are for the entire week, and if you choose to attend only one or more days, there will be no pro-rated or refunded payment for the missed days. To secure your child's space in our camp, payment for the full week is mandatory. Single-day registrations are no longer accepted. A nonrefundable registration deposit of \$30 is required at the time of registration, and the remaining balance for each week will be invoiced to the provided email address.

***Registrations for camp will not be accepted or processed on the weekend before the camp starts. Any registrations for camp will need to be processed by close of business the Friday before the start date of that camp.***

**Payment for Weekly and Monthly regularly schedule programs:** Payment for regularly scheduled Weekly and Monthly programs must be made in full by the close of business two days before the class. Failure to contact us for cancellation by the close of business one week before the scheduled class will result in no refund.

**Little Learners:** Children must be 2 years and 9 months when entering the program in the Fall (3 years by December 31). NO EXCEPTIONS. Children must be toilet trained and wearing underpants (not pull-ups) to attend. We understand that accidents happen, but we cannot accommodate changing diapers.

## **Delinquent Accounts**

Any family with a past due balance with Sturgeon City before the start of the program will not be allowed to register or have children attend until the amount is paid in full. For questions about your bill or past due balances please contact us at 910-750-5876.

An account that is more than 30 days delinquent will require automatic withdrawal of the child/children, unless appropriate arrangements have been made with the Program Manager or Executive Director.

**Return Drafts or Checks for Non-Sufficient Funds:** Any drafts or checks returned for Non-Sufficient Funds (NSF) will be subjected to an additional \$35.00 service charge.

## **Cancellation Policy**

### **Camps:**

In the event of a cancellation less than the Tuesday before the camp starts, 50% of the camp payment will be forfeited, excluding the nonrefundable \$30 registration deposit. Refunds will not be issued for registered camps if your child does not attend. Furthermore, no refunds will be provided for cancellations made less than 48 hours before the beginning of the camp week, with the \$30 nonrefundable registration deposit retained. To initiate a refund request, written

requests must be sent to [programming@sturgeoncity.org](mailto:programming@sturgeoncity.org) and must be received by the close of business on the Monday preceding the start of the camp.

### **Other Programs:**

Failure to contact us for cancellation by the close of business one week before the scheduled class will result in no refund. To initiate a refund request, written requests must be sent to [programming@sturgeoncity.org](mailto:programming@sturgeoncity.org) and must be received by the close of business one week before the scheduled class.

### **Drop-off Procedure**

Doors open promptly at 7:50 am or 10 minutes before program start time! We cannot accept drop offs before 7:50 am or 10 minutes before. Parents/guardians are required to sign-in their child on the first day of weeklong camps or each program. All Entrance/Exit doors will be re-locked at 8:10 am or 10 minutes after program starts.

### **Pick-up Procedure**

Parents/guardians are required to sign-out their child on the first day of weeklong camps or each program. Entrance/Exit doors will be unlocked at 3:55 pm or 5 minutes before.

Children will not be allowed to leave Sturgeon City with anyone except parents and persons designated to pick up the child. If someone else (not on that list) is to pick up your child, please send a note to that effect. Verbal messages brought by your child cannot be accepted. Anyone picking up your child will need to show photo identification.

### **Pick-up time**

Please communicate any changes in your child's schedule (early/late drop-off or pick-up) with a staff member ahead of time so that we can have your child ready.

1st LATE PICKUP: You will receive a "Freebie" reminder.

2nd LATE PICK UP: late fees apply to families picking up after program time ends.

- First 15 minutes, \$1 per minute
- Second 15 minutes, \$3 per minute

If a child is not picked up by a half an hour after program time ends and no contact has been made with family or emergency contact persons, Sturgeon City staff will contact the proper authorities.

## **The Sturgeon City & Family Partnership**

To be successful in achieving our mission, it is essential that families and Sturgeon City staff work together cooperatively. The relationship between home and Sturgeon City works best when families understand our mission, share our core values, and support our programs and staff.

### **Communication with Families**

Communication between staff and families is an essential part of your child's educational experience. We value conversations with our families, and we welcome the opportunity to touch base about your child's day or their development, or to answer any questions you may have. Please keep the communication lines open with us and share with us any important changes or significant events going on in your child's life so that we can provide the best possible care for them. While we are happy to answer quick questions at drop-off or pick-up time, when children are present, they are the teachers' top priority. If you would like to have a more in-depth discussion regarding your child, we are more than happy to schedule a meeting time outside of class, and you are always welcome to email the Executive Director or Program Manager with any questions or concerns. \*In instances where we need to contact parents at home or work, it is important that we have current information on file. To maintain current files we ask that you notify us immediately when there is a change in the information regarding your child.

### **Individual Needs**

Sturgeon City strives to meet the needs of all of our program participants. However, due to staffing limitations, we are unable to provide 1:1 assistance in our programming. Staff will accommodate children with special individual needs, within reason, provided that these needs are communicated to our staff as soon as they are known and that it is within our capacity to provide the needed support. Again, please note that due to health and safety concerns, all children must be toilet trained and toilet confident to be able to join our programming. Families are encouraged to provide staff with any information that they feel will help the Sturgeon City support their child.

### **When We Can't Provide Needed Support**

It is our hope that children enrolled at Sturgeon City will complete their experience, but this is not always possible or ideal. There are times when, even after receiving individual support, a participant may continue to exhibit either a lack of developmental progress or a pattern of situationally inappropriate behavior of such frequency, duration, or intensity that it disrupts that participant's own experience or the experience of others. Sometimes, the level of support a child needs to engage productively in the program is simply greater than our limited staff capacity to give. In these instances, we will need to withdraw the child's enrollment in programs, as our goal is to serve all of our participants within the context of our available resources.

### **Atypical Behavior**

When there are special circumstances that might affect your child and family, such as the absence of family members or family illness, please communicate this with your Sturgeon City staff, as it will help us understand any atypical behavior the child may exhibit.

## **Family Involvement**

Family involvement is critical to the development of young children and to the success of their program experience. Family involvement includes:

- Picking up and dropping off your child promptly at designated times
- Talking with staff at pick-up about your child's day
- Talking with staff at the start of the week about any concerns you may have
- Sending your child each day with the appropriate clothing and supplies

## **Behavior Expectations**

We believe in creating a safe, secure and fun environment where all youth have the opportunity to learn the importance of demonstrating good character. We believe that in order to do this, all youth need to know and understand the rules and expectations for appropriate behavior. We also believe that when youth do not follow the rules or when they demonstrate inappropriate behavior, we have an opportunity to help youth learn from their mistakes.

All youth are expected to follow the rules established by the Sturgeon City for the safety of all in the program. Your cooperation and support ensure that all youth have a safe and fun experience.

The Sturgeon City does not allow the following behaviors including but not limited to:

- Any action that could threaten the physical or emotional safety of the youth, other youth or staff. Prohibited conduct may include, but is not limited to: abusive jokes, insults, slurs, threats, name-calling or intimidation
- Destructive behavior
- Behavior that is a violation of personal boundaries or is of a habitual nature and negatively impacts the program, and/or safety and enjoyment of others
- Behavior that is of a sexual nature
- Some behaviors could result in immediate suspension or dismissal
- Running away

We will make every effort to work with the parent or guardian to ensure a cooperative approach for children having difficulties with behavior. We are here to serve and protect all of our children! A parent may be called at work or home at any time the child exhibits uncontrollable behavior that cannot be modified by Sturgeon City's staff. The parent may be asked to take the child home immediately. The following steps may be taken regarding children who display chronic disruptive behavior, upsetting to the emotional or physical well-being of another child or an adult.

### *Initial Consultation*

The program educator will speak with the parents or provide written information about the incident to the parent or guardian.

### *Second Consultation*

The Program Manager and Educator may request that the parent or guardian meet for a conference. Intervention strategies will be discussed. The best solution toward solving the problem will be agreed upon by the Program Manager, Educator, and parent or guardian.

### *Third Consultation*

If the initial plan for helping the child fails, the parent will again be asked to meet with the director or manager and teaching staff involved. Another attempt will be made to identify the problem, and establish a new, or revised, approach for solving the problem. Our goal is to work as a team to better serve each child.

### **Dismissal from the program**

When the previous attempts have been followed and no progress has been made toward solving the problem, the child may be disenrolled from Sturgeon City at the discretion of the Program Manager and Executive Director. Dismissal from the program for disciplinary reasons could result in permanent removal from all Sturgeon City programs.

NOTE: Corporal punishment will not be allowed. This is defined as the use of negative physical touching (spanking, slapping, pinching, etc.), exclusion from large activities, or exclusion from any learning activity. In certain instances, a child may be physically restrained in order to keep the child, other children, or staff safe from harm. No unusual punishment will be allowed such as humiliation, ridicule, threat, or coercion.

### **Family Grievance Procedure**

In our daily communication with families, we strive to resolve issues that may come up. However, if at any time a family feels that an issue has not been addressed or resolved and it may need to be pursued further, we are here to support that process by providing several opportunities for recourse. The early identification and communication of concern and prompt initiation of a resolution can help avoid further problems.

If you do have a question, concern or issue, the following steps will help facilitate the problem-solving process:

- First, speak with your program educators about your concern; they will work with you to determine a mutually agreeable course of action.
- If, after working with your program educators, you still feel the issue is not resolved, speak with the Program Manager, Jamie McIntire
- If you still feel the issue is not resolved, contact the Executive Director, Lisa Murabito
- If the behavior continues and cannot be controlled, the child will be disenrolled. The Executive Director, acting with the advice of the Program Manager and/or Educator, will make this decision.

While families may not agree with every decision made by the Sturgeon City and its staff, in most cases, families, and staff find enough common ground to continue a mutually respectful relationship. In extreme cases, however, a disagreement may emerge that is so severe that the families cannot remain a constructive member of the Sturgeon City community. In such cases, the Sturgeon City and the family should consider whether another environment would be more suitable for the family. In the very rare and extreme cases where family behavior undermines mutual trust and respect, including verbal abuse, the use of threats, bullying and other similar behavior, the Sturgeon City reserves the right, at any time, to immediately terminate the participant's and family's relationship with the programs.

Parents should judge beforehand whether their child can handle a program setting, as the Sturgeon City will not refund program fees for these reasons. This policy represents our best effort to protect children with behavioral problems, their families, other children, and our staff.

### **Confidentiality**

The Sturgeon City will maintain confidentiality and respect each family's right to privacy, refraining from the disclosure of any confidential information. Children's files are stored away and only accessible to those who are working directly with your child. However, if we have reason to believe that a child's welfare may be at risk, we are bound by the law to share confidential information with state agencies or individuals who may intervene on behalf of the child.

### **General Safety Measures**

Sturgeon City follows these guidelines to ensure the safety and security of all children here at the Center:

- All exterior doors are kept always locked except at drop-off and pick-up.
- The Environmental Education Center building is equipped with a security cameras.
- We keep current copies of health and emergency paperwork at the Environmental Education Center desk.
- Fire drills are held once each quarter. Evacuation routes for fire drills and other events will be posted near the exit doors in the classrooms.

If an emergency occurs at Sturgeon City, we will take the following actions:

1. If it is a life-threatening emergency, we will contact emergency medical services (911).
2. If it is not a life-threatening emergency, we will determine appropriate next steps in caring for the child.
3. In both cases, the child's family will be called. If we are unable to reach the family, we will try the other emergency contacts listed in their paperwork.

**You must keep your child's emergency contact name and number current in the records.**

**Notify us immediately if there is any change.**

### **Incident Reports**

If an accident, injury, or emergency should occur, we aim to learn from that experience, and modify our policies and procedures if necessary. An Incident Report Form will be completed and given to families for any accident or incident occurring on our property and/or during one of our programs onsite or offsite. The original report will be given to the family, if requested, and a copy will be kept on file.

### **Background Clearances**

All full-time and part-time staff are required to submit state and federal background clearances as a condition of employment.



### Gear Guide

Be sure to label every **piece of clothing and gear** with your child's full name, such as with label stickers or sharpie, so lost items can be returned to their proper owner. **You can expect that your child will get dirty while playing. Please do not send your child to our programs in their best shoes and clothes.** It is best to send an extra set of clothing for our younger campers in their backpack.

### Possessions

Sometimes children may want to bring special toys to Sturgeon City use as a "bridge" between home and school. We try to discourage this because it can lead to problems with other children and the possible loss of special toys. We have a wide variety of materials as well as many opportunities to work on sharing at school. We encourage you to have your child to leave personal belongings at home. Items not permitted at school include candy or gum, toys, stuffed animals, **personal electronic devices, electronic toys or games**, and/or money. This also includes trading cards such as Pokémon cards and the like. These provide a distraction during the day. Sturgeon City is not responsible for items damaged or lost at school. Sturgeon City will not be liable for toys, possessions, or other personal property. Play guns, weapons or other toys that encourage aggressive play are never welcome in our classrooms. We are trying to build cooperation and concern for one another in our school; these items promote aggression, competition and hostile feelings. Please leave these items at home.

**Personal electronic devices such as cell phones, smart watches, cellular-based watches, tablets, laptops, or any other electronic device are not permitted in class. These items will need to be put away; if they are being used throughout the day a staff member will take the devices and return them only to the parent.**

### Appropriate Footwear

All programs spend time outdoors, closed-toe shoes are always required.

### Bug Spray & Sunscreen

It is recommended that the program participant apply sunscreen/ bug repellent prior to arrival and leave a bottle of the same spray or lotion with your child's name on it with a staff member, to be re-applied when necessary. We will not share other children's sprays/ lotions.

### Snack & Lunch

Mealtimes are a special time for building relationships and developing connections while engaging in conversations among children and educators. Snack and lunch items are not provided by Sturgeon City. We encourage a healthy snack and a lunch. We also encourage children to drink water throughout the day and ask that families bring a reusable water bottle for their child daily. This should be taken home at the end of each day to be washed and sanitized.

As we are instilling a respect for the environment and its value to us, we encourage families to pack a low or no-waste lunch, using reusable lunch bags and containers. These reusable items

should be labeled with the participant's name. Please do not send food that needs to be heated— this is not a service we can offer.

### **Food Allergies**

Many students have food allergies. The prevalence of peanut and tree nut allergies in children has doubled in the past five years. A life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis can occur even with the slightest exposure to an allergen. If your child has a food allergy, please let us know and complete an **Allergy Action Plan**, to provide guidance in prevention and outline steps to take in case of exposure. Our program is not peanut/nut free; however, if your child has a severe food allergy, please contact the manager prior to your child coming to program, and we can make a plan to address any allergy concerns. **If we have a child in our programs with peanut or other severe food allergies, we may restrict certain foods from being sent in for the safety of that child.** To provide a safe environment for all our students, the following guidelines and steps are followed:

- Students with allergies are supported in taking responsibility to be knowledgeable of their allergies and avoid foods containing a harmful ingredient.
- When an individual food allergy care plan is in place, children, families, and Sturgeon City staff will all adhere and follow the set plan. If the plan includes restriction of certain foods in class, all families will be notified of this restriction and be expected to adhere to it.
- We ask that families remain flexible if special health accommodations come up during program. Our main concern is the health and safety of the children and with the help and support of families we can ensure a safe environment for all.
- All children who are in class with a child who has a life-threatening allergy should wash hands after eating.
- Children should not trade or share lunch, snacks, or drinks.

### **Illness Policy**

Sturgeon City takes precautions to prevent the spread of illness by maintaining a clean environment, requiring frequent handwashing for both students and staff, and encouraging healthy habits such as covering coughs and sneezes with the elbow. To help us in preventing the spread of illness, please keep your child home if any of the following symptoms are present:

- Green or yellow runny nose
- Fever of 100F or higher in the last 24 hours
- Chronic or continuous coughing or wheezing
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or stomach complaints
- Symptoms of unknown origin, such as a rash
- An illness during its contagious stage, such as “pink eye”

Recovering children are more likely to pick up a new illness. One of the most important ways to help a child recover is to provide them with plenty of time to rest their bodies. Please keep in mind that we are outdoors daily, and our students are very active throughout the day. Please keep your child home if they are not well enough to comfortably spend extended periods of time outside engaging in vigorous play, so that they can fully recover from their illness.

If your child will be absent due to illness (or any other reason) please contact us via phone or email to let us know.

### **Getting Sick at Sturgeon City**

If your child becomes ill while in our care, experiences a fever of 100F or higher, or is suspected to be contagious, they will be isolated from the group to rest comfortably with a staff member. You will be contacted immediately to pick them up. If we cannot reach you, we will call your emergency contacts.

### **Bee Sting/Fire Ant Allergies**

Families of children with known bee sting and fire ant allergies must complete an **Allergy Action Plan** and submit it with their enrollment paperwork. If a child with an allergy is stung or bitten, we will implement the Allergy Action Plan and families will be notified. Any time an EpiPen is administered, our protocol is to follow it with a call to 911. If a child without a known allergy begins to develop symptoms of an allergic reaction after having been stung or bitten, Benadryl will be administered and 911 will be called. This is treated as a medical emergency and families will be notified.

### **Injury Policy**

Staff members at Sturgeon City are trained in First Aid and CPR. It is our goal to provide a safe environment for all students but playing outside always comes with risks and sometimes accidents happen. Minor scrapes and bumps are typically easily remedied with a band aid or ice pack, and the caring words and comfort of a teacher. For injuries that may require additional attention at home (such as further cleaning of a cut) you will be notified by a teacher at pick up. For more serious injuries or if a child appears to be in continued discomfort following our medical care, you will be notified via phone by the Program Manager.

In the event of an accident that requires medical attention beyond basic first aid, we will do one of the following:

- Call parents/guardians or emergency contacts to pick up the child immediately to seek medical attention; or
- If severe and immediate help is deemed necessary, we will call 911 and a staff member will accompany the child to the emergency room until parents/guardians arrive.

**First Aid Supplies:** Each program group will be equipped with a first aid kit. This first aid kit will be always with the group.

### **Weather Closures**

As part of living in North Carolina, we may occasionally experience weather events that create unsafe conditions both on at Sturgeon City and on the roads for staff and families. Should we need to cancel class due to hurricane, flooding, ice, or another weather event, you will be notified via email and/or phone. We may sometimes operate on a delayed opening, which you will also be notified of as soon as our decision is made. If weather worsens during the day, we

may need to close early to ensure families and staff can get home safely. We will call and/or email should any of these changes arise during the day.

### **Separation**

All children have difficulty separating from parents, occasionally. New children usually have an adjustment period during which separation is difficult. We encourage you to view this as normal and typical behavior for a young child and not to be unduly upset by it. It is easier for everyone if you separate quickly and matter-of-factly when arriving with your child.

### **Special Circumstances**

We would appreciate your letting us know of any significant changes in living arrangements or other circumstances in your home. Our knowing will allow us to better assist your child in dealing with these changes.

### **Birthdays & Special Occasions**

We are more than happy to celebrate your child's special day! Birthday celebrations are significant events in children's lives. Please feel free to celebrate your child's birthday while at the program. However, if you plan on bringing in snack items to share, due to allergy and COVID concerns, we ask that you communicate with staff a few days beforehand regarding the snack you would like to bring in so that staff can ask if it is okay with other families. This way we can ensure that we can celebrate properly and address any questions or concerns. If you are planning a celebration outside of school and expect to invite all their classmates, you may bring invitations to school. If you are not inviting every child in the class, we request that you do so privately.

### **Photo Policies**

The Education Center uses photos from our adventures for promotional materials such as our website, social media, and brochures to give families an accurate and exciting representation of what their child's day at Sturgeon City could look like. All families selected on their enrollment form whether they give permission for photos of their child to be used in this format.

### **Acknowledgement**

The Parent Handbook provides important information about Sturgeon City. I understand that I should consult the Programs Manager or the Executive Director regarding questions not covered in the handbook. The information and policies described here are subject to change, and I acknowledge that revisions to the handbook may occur. While these changes may be communicated through official notices, I understand that revised information may supersede, modify, or eliminate existing policies with or without prior notice. I understand that this handbook supersedes any prior handbook.