

NextZen Academy

Parent & Family Handbook

Program Year 2026-2027

Mill Creek East, Snohomish County, Washington State

Licensed by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

Governing Regulation: WAC 110-300 — Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs

Effective Date: June 23, 2026

NextZen Academy

Parent & Family Handbook | Mill Creek East, WA | DCYF Licensed | WAC 110-300

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① Notice to Families

This handbook constitutes an agreement between NextZen Academy and the enrolling family. Please read it carefully in its entirety. A signed acknowledgment (Section 15) is required before your child's first day of attendance. Policies are reviewed annually and updated as needed to maintain compliance with current DCYF licensing requirements.

NextZen Academy

Section 1 — Welcome & Mission Statement

Section 1: Welcome & Mission Statement

1.1 Welcome Letter from the Director

Dear NextZen Academy Families,

On behalf of the entire team at NextZen Academy, welcome. We are so honored that you have chosen us to be partners in your child's earliest learning journey. Trusting another person — and an organization — with your most precious family

member is one of the most meaningful decisions a parent can make, and we do not take that responsibility lightly.

NextZen Academy was founded with a single, unwavering conviction: that every child deserves a safe, nurturing, and intellectually stimulating environment from the very first months of life. Located here in the heart of Mill Creek East, we are proud to serve the families of Snohomish County and to be a fully licensed program under Washington State's Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

This handbook has been prepared to give you a clear and complete picture of how we operate — from enrollment and tuition to health policies, curriculum, and communication. We encourage you to read every section carefully, ask questions freely, and reach out to us at any time. You are not simply clients or customers; you are partners, and your voice matters deeply in how we shape and grow this program.

We look forward to celebrating every milestone, discovery, and joyful moment with your child and your family.

Warmly,

The Director, NextZen Academy

Mill Creek East, Washington

1.2 Mission Statement

"To nurture the whole child — mind, body, and spirit — through intentional, developmentally appropriate care and education in a safe, inclusive, and joyful environment, in true partnership with families and in service to our community."

1.3 Vision Statement

NextZen Academy envisions a community where every child, regardless of background or ability, begins life with the confidence, curiosity, and foundational skills needed to thrive — in school and throughout life. We strive to be recognized as a center of excellence in early childhood education in Snohomish County and the greater Mill Creek East community.

1.4 Philosophy of Care

Our philosophy is grounded in the belief that early childhood — from birth through age eight — represents a uniquely critical period of human development. During these years, children develop at a pace unmatched at any other time in life. The relationships they form, the environments they explore, and the experiences they encounter lay the neurological and emotional foundations for all future learning.

At NextZen Academy, we embrace the following core principles:

- **The whole child matters.** We attend to social-emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and physical development in equal measure.
- **Play is the work of childhood.** Structured and unstructured play are the primary vehicles through which young children make meaning of their world.
- **Relationships are the foundation of learning.** Warm, consistent, responsive relationships between caregivers and children are essential to healthy development.
- **Families are our partners.** Parents and guardians are children's first and most important teachers. We seek to support, not supplant, the family.
- **Diversity is a strength.** We celebrate the rich cultural, linguistic, and family diversity of our community and incorporate it intentionally into our curriculum and environment.
- **Equity and inclusion are non-negotiable.** Every child is welcomed, valued, and supported to reach their full potential.

1.5 Program Overview and Age Groups Served

NextZen Academy provides licensed group childcare services five days per week. We currently serve children across four developmental age groups, each housed in a dedicated classroom environment staffed by qualified early childhood professionals at DCYF-required ratios.

Program Room	Age Range	Max Group Size	Staff:Child Ratio
Infant Room	6 weeks – 12 months	8	1:4

Program Room	Age Range	Max Group Size	Staff:Child Ratio
Toddler Room	12 - 36 months	12	1:7
Preschool Room	3 - 5 years	20	1:10
School Age Room	5 - 12 years (before/after school & summer)	25	1:15

Staff-to-child ratios are maintained in compliance with WAC 110-300-0225 (Infant/Toddler) and WAC 110-300-0235 (Preschool/School Age). Ratios are posted in each classroom and are available for parent review at any time.

1.6 Commitment to NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice

NextZen Academy is committed to implementing the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) framework for Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in all of our programs. DAP means that our educators make curriculum and instructional decisions based on three types of knowledge: (1) what is known about child development and learning at each stage; (2) what is known about each individual child's strengths, interests, needs, and family background; and (3) what is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live.

Our staff participates in ongoing professional development aligned with NAEYC standards, and our learning environments are intentionally designed to reflect DAP principles. We use the *Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDG)* as our curriculum framework, ensuring alignment with state developmental benchmarks from birth through third grade.

NextZen Academy

Section 2 — Enrollment & Admission

Section 2: Enrollment & Admission

2.1 Eligibility and Enrollment Process

NextZen Academy is open to all children ages 6 weeks through 12 years who meet the age criteria for the program rooms listed in Section 1.5. Enrollment is subject to available space in each age group. The enrollment process consists of the following steps:

1. **Inquiry & Tour:** Families interested in enrollment are encouraged to schedule a program tour to visit the classrooms, meet the staff, and learn about our curriculum and daily routines.
2. **Application for Enrollment:** Completion and submission of the NextZen Academy Enrollment Application form.
3. **Waitlist (if applicable):** If space is not immediately available, families are placed on our waitlist (see Section 2.3).
4. **Enrollment Packet:** Upon space availability, families receive and must complete the full enrollment packet prior to the child's first day (see Section 2.2).
5. **Orientation Meeting:** A brief orientation with the classroom teacher and/or director is scheduled before or on the first day of attendance.
6. **Start Date Confirmation:** A mutually agreed-upon start date is confirmed in writing.

2.2 Required Enrollment Documents

In compliance with WAC 110-300 and DCYF licensing requirements, the following documents must be completed and submitted **before** a child's first day of attendance. Incomplete enrollment packets will result in a delay of the child's start date.

Document	Details / Notes	Required By
Completed Enrollment Application	Child information, household contacts,	DCYF / NextZen Policy

Document	Details / Notes	Required By
	emergency contacts (minimum 2)	
Certified Copy of Birth Certificate	To verify child's legal name and date of birth	WAC 110-300-0201
Current Immunization Records	Certificate of Immunization Status (CIS) form per WAC 246-105	WAC 110-300-0242
Emergency Contact Authorization Form	Minimum two emergency contacts, including at least one local contact	WAC 110-300-0201
Authorized Pick-Up Form	List of all individuals authorized to pick up the child; photo ID required on first pick-up	WAC 110-300-0201
Medical / Health History Form	Known allergies, medical conditions, medications, health care provider information	WAC 110-300-0201
Tuition Agreement / Financial Agreement	Signed confirmation of tuition rates, payment schedule, and fee policies	NextZen Policy
Medication Authorization Form (if applicable)	Required if child requires any daily or as-needed medications at the program	WAC 110-300-0260
Photo & Media Release Form	Written consent for photographs and use of child's image (see Section 13)	NextZen Policy
Subsidy / DSHS Authorization (if applicable)	Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) or DSHS authorization paperwork	DSHS / NextZen Policy
Custody Documentation (if applicable)	Court orders limiting parental access must be provided to the director	WAC 110-300-0201
Signed Parent Handbook Acknowledgment	Signature page from this handbook (Section 15)	NextZen Policy
Infant Feeding Plan (Infants only)	Written plan for formula or breast milk preferences, feeding schedule, and introduction of solids	WAC 110-300-0190

2.3 Waiting List Policy

When enrollment is at or near capacity for a given age group, families may request placement on our waitlist. The following procedures apply to the NextZen Academy waiting list:

- Placement on the waitlist does not guarantee enrollment and does not obligate the family to enroll when space becomes available.
- Families are placed on the waitlist in the order in which their completed waitlist request forms are received.
- When a space becomes available, the family at the top of the waitlist for the appropriate age group will be contacted by phone and/or email. Families will have **48 hours** to confirm their intent to enroll before the space is offered to the next family on the list.
- Siblings of currently enrolled children receive priority waitlist placement.
- Families currently participating in the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) subsidy program receive priority placement per DCYF partnership guidelines.
- NextZen Academy does not charge a fee to be placed on the waitlist.

2.4 Subsidy and DSHS / Working Connections Child Care Enrollment

NextZen Academy proudly accepts the Washington State **Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)** subsidy administered through the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Eligible families may receive financial assistance to offset the cost of childcare. To enroll using WCCC benefits:

7. Contact DCYF/DSHS to apply for Working Connections Child Care eligibility and obtain a provider authorization code.
8. Notify the NextZen Academy director of your subsidy status at the time of inquiry or enrollment application.
9. Provide NextZen Academy with a current WCCC authorization document before your child's first day.

10. Families are responsible for any co-payment amount not covered by the subsidy, due according to the standard payment schedule (see Section 4).

11. Families must notify NextZen Academy promptly of any changes in subsidy status, employment, or family income that may affect eligibility.

NextZen Academy also accepts other eligible childcare subsidy programs, including but not limited to military childcare fee assistance programs and qualifying employer childcare benefits. Please speak with the director for more information.

2.5 Non-Discrimination Policy

NextZen Academy does not discriminate in its enrollment, services, or program activities on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, disability, age, familial status, marital status, source of income, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law.

Reference: WAC 110-300-0030 — Non-discrimination. This policy applies to all children and families seeking enrollment, all enrolled families, and all program activities and services offered by NextZen Academy.

Families who believe they have experienced discrimination in any aspect of our program are encouraged to speak with the director and/or file a complaint with DCYF. Contact information for DCYF's licensing and complaint division is provided in Section 10 of this handbook.

NextZen Academy

Section 3 — Hours, Schedule & Attendance

Section 3: Hours, Schedule & Attendance

3.1 Operating Hours and Days

Day	Program Hours	Drop-Off Window	Pick-Up Deadline
Monday – Friday	6:30 AM – 6:00 PM	6:30 AM – 9:00 AM	6:00 PM
Saturday – Sunday	<i>Closed</i>	—	—

NextZen Academy observes the following **program closure days**. Tuition is not pro-rated or refunded for scheduled closures. Families will be notified in writing at least two weeks in advance of all scheduled closures:

- New Year's Day (January 1)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day (third Monday in January)
- Presidents' Day (third Monday in February)
- Memorial Day (last Monday in May)
- Juneteenth (June 19)
- Independence Day (July 4)
- Labor Day (first Monday in September)
- Veterans Day (November 11)
- Thanksgiving Day and the Friday following (November)
- Christmas Eve and Christmas Day (December 24–25)
- Up to two (2) Staff Professional Development Days per program year (scheduled in advance)



Reminder: Program Hours

NextZen Academy opens at 6:30 AM and closes promptly at 6:00 PM. Arrival after 9:00 AM may disrupt classroom routines and should be communicated to the program in advance. Please plan accordingly to ensure pick-up before 6:00 PM.

3.2 Arrival and Departure Procedures

Morning Arrival: Upon arrival, the parent or authorized adult must accompany the child into the building and complete the **electronic or paper sign-in** at the child's classroom door. A staff member must receive the child directly from the adult. Children may not be left unattended in the parking lot, lobby, or hallway at any time. Staff will conduct a brief daily health check at drop-off (see Section 5.3).

Afternoon Departure: At pick-up, the authorized adult must sign the child out using the program's sign-out log, recording the time and their signature. **Photo identification will be required** for any individual not previously known to staff or upon reasonable staff discretion. Children will only be released to individuals listed on the child's authorized pick-up form on file.

Reference: WAC 110-300-0201 — Child sign-in/sign-out requirements; WAC 110-300-0165 — Safety requirements.

3.3 Late Pick-Up Policy and Fees

NextZen Academy closes at **6:00 PM** each operating day. Late pick-up significantly impacts staff who have family and personal obligations, and it is unfair to children who must wait beyond the scheduled program day. Therefore, the following late fee schedule applies:

Minutes Late After 6:00 PM	Late Fee
1 – 10 minutes	\$15.00 per incident
11 – 20 minutes	\$25.00 per incident
21 – 30 minutes	\$40.00 per incident
Each additional 15 minutes beyond 30	\$15.00 additional per 15-minute increment

Late fees are due at the time of the next scheduled tuition payment. Repeated late pick-ups (three or more incidents within a calendar month) may result in a conference with the director and, if unresolved, may jeopardize continued enrollment. In the event a child has not been picked up by 6:30 PM and no emergency contact can be reached, staff are required by law to contact local law enforcement and/or DCYF.

3.4 Authorized Pick-Up and Custody Documentation Requirements

The safety and well-being of every child enrolled at NextZen Academy is our highest priority. The following policies govern authorized pick-up and custody-related situations:

- Only individuals listed on the child's **Authorized Pick-Up Form** on file will be permitted to pick up the child. This form must be kept current at all times.
- Any addition, removal, or change to the authorized pick-up list must be made in writing by the custodial parent or legal guardian. Verbal changes are not accepted.
- Staff will require a **valid, government-issued photo ID** from any individual they do not personally recognize, regardless of whether the person is listed on the form.
- If parents/guardians are divorced, separated, or subject to any custody order, a copy of the court order must be provided to the director and kept in the child's file. NextZen Academy will follow the most current court order on file.
- In the absence of a court order restricting a parent's rights, both legal parents retain the right to pick up their child. Staff cannot restrict pick-up by a legal parent unless a court order specifically prohibits it and is on file.
- If a custodial parent requests that the other parent not be permitted to pick up a child, a current, applicable court order must be provided. NextZen Academy cannot enforce verbal custody disputes.

Important: Unverified Pick-Up

If an unauthorized or unverified individual attempts to pick up a child, staff will politely decline to release the child, contact the custodial parent/guardian immediately, and if necessary, contact local law enforcement. This policy is in place to protect your child and will be enforced without exception.

3.5 Attendance Notification Policy

Regular, consistent attendance supports children's developmental progress and social relationships. We ask families to adhere to the following attendance notification expectations:

- If a child will be **absent or tardy**, please notify the program by **8:00 AM** on the day of absence by calling or texting the main program number or sending a message through the family communication app.
- Illness absences: Please describe the nature of the illness so that staff can monitor for potential communicable disease spread among other enrolled children (see Section 5).
- Extended absences of more than three consecutive days for any reason other than illness must be communicated to the director in advance.
- Unexcused absences of five or more consecutive days without communication may result in the child's enrollment slot being offered to a family on the waiting list, and a written notice will be issued to the family.
- Tuition is due regardless of absences for any reason (illness, vacation, holidays, or other family circumstances), as we hold the child's enrollment slot and incur ongoing staffing costs.

NextZen Academy

Section 4 — Tuition & Fees

Section 4: Tuition & Fees

4.1 Tuition Rates by Age Group

The following tuition rates reflect full-time enrollment (Monday through Friday). Part-time enrollment options may be available based on program capacity; please

inquire with the director for part-time pricing. Rates are reviewed annually and are subject to change with a minimum of **30 days written notice** to enrolled families.

Program Room	Age Group	Full-Time Weekly Rate	Full-Time Monthly Rate
Infant Room	6 weeks - 12 months	\$450.00 / week	\$1,950.00 / month
Toddler Room	12 - 36 months	\$375.00 / week	\$1,625.00 / month
Preschool Room	3 - 5 years	\$325.00 / week	\$1,408.00 / month
School Age — Before/After School	5 - 12 years	\$200.00 / week	\$866.00 / month
School Age — Full Day (Summer/Break)	5 - 12 years	\$295.00 / week	\$1,279.00 / month

Monthly rates are calculated as (weekly rate × 52 weeks) ÷ 12 months. Tuition is the same each month regardless of the number of program days in a given month.

4.2 Payment Schedule

- **Monthly billing:** Tuition is due on the **1st of each month**. An invoice will be issued on or before the 25th of the preceding month.
- **Weekly billing (optional):** Families may request weekly billing, in which case tuition is due by **Monday of each program week**.
- Accepted payment methods: check (payable to NextZen Academy), bank ACH/electronic transfer, or credit/debit card via the parent portal. Cash is accepted but must be counted and receipted in the presence of two staff members.
- Tuition payments are processed through our secure family portal. Families will receive login credentials upon enrollment.

4.3 Late Payment Fees

Tuition payments not received by the due date are subject to the following:

- A **\$25.00 late fee** will be assessed for any payment received between 1 and 5 days after the due date.
- A **\$50.00 late fee** will be assessed for any payment received 6 or more days after the due date.
- A **\$35.00 returned check / NSF fee** applies to any payment returned by the bank for non-sufficient funds.
- Accounts outstanding by 10 or more days may result in a director conference and, if unresolved, may jeopardize continued enrollment.
- NextZen Academy reserves the right to require automatic ACH payment from families with two or more late payment incidents in a 12-month period.

4.4 Registration and Supply Fees

Fee Type	Amount	When Due	Refundable?
Annual Registration Fee	\$125.00 per child	At enrollment, then each July 1 for re-enrollment	No
Annual Supply / Activity Fee	\$75.00 per child	At enrollment, then each September 1	No
Field Trip Fee (as applicable)	Varies (announced per trip)	Prior to each field trip	No (once payment processed)
Returned Check / NSF Fee	\$35.00	Upon occurrence	No

4.5 Subsidy Co-Pay Policies

Families receiving Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) or other approved subsidy assistance are responsible for their **family co-payment amount** as determined by DSHS or the applicable subsidy agency. The following policies apply:

- The family co-payment is due on the same schedule as regular tuition (see Section 4.2).
- NextZen Academy bills the subsidy agency directly for the subsidy portion of tuition. Families are only responsible for the co-payment amount.

- If the subsidy agency denies or reduces payment for any reason (including lapses in eligibility), the family is responsible for the full tuition amount for affected dates.
- Families must notify NextZen Academy immediately of any changes to subsidy authorization, including re-authorization dates, to prevent billing disruptions.
- Families may not use subsidy funds to offset the annual registration or supply fees, which are the full responsibility of the family.

4.6 Refund and Withdrawal Notice Requirements

NextZen Academy requires a minimum of **two (2) weeks written notice** prior to a child's last day of attendance for all voluntary withdrawals. The following refund policies apply:

- Written withdrawal notice must be submitted to the director in person or via email. Verbal notice is not accepted.
- If two weeks written notice is not provided, the family is responsible for two weeks of tuition beyond the child's last day of attendance.
- Registration and supply fees are non-refundable under any circumstances.
- Tuition paid in advance for weeks beyond the withdrawal date will be refunded within 14 days of the child's last confirmed day, provided proper notice was given.
- NextZen Academy reserves the right to terminate enrollment with two weeks notice for any of the following reasons: failure to maintain current payment, repeated policy violations, or inability to safely meet a child's needs within the existing program structure.

Section 5: Health & Illness Policies

Reference: WAC 110-300-0240 through WAC 110-300-0260 — Health, Illness, and Medication Policies

5.1 Exclusion Criteria for Illness

The health and safety of every child and staff member is our primary concern. Children who are ill cannot participate comfortably in program activities and may expose other children and staff to communicable illness. The following exclusion criteria apply. **A child must be excluded from the program** if they exhibit any of the following signs or symptoms:

Symptom / Condition	Exclusion Requirement	Return Criteria
Fever $\geq$ 100.4°F (38°C)	Immediate exclusion	Fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication
Vomiting (2 or more episodes in 24 hours)	Exclusion required	Symptom-free for 24 hours; able to retain food/fluids
Diarrhea (3 or more loose stools in 24 hours, or blood/mucus)	Exclusion required	Symptom-free for 24 hours; or as directed by licensed healthcare provider
Undiagnosed rash with fever or behavioral change	Exclusion required	Rash identified and cleared by healthcare provider; no fever
Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye) — bacterial/viral	Exclusion required	24 hours after starting appropriate antibiotic treatment; or cleared by provider
Strep throat	Exclusion required	24 hours after starting antibiotic treatment and fever-free
Lice (head lice)	Exclusion required	After initial treatment and confirmed nit-free by staff
Chickenpox (Varicella)	Exclusion required	All lesions are dry and crusted (typically 6 days after onset)
Impetigo	Exclusion required	24 hours after starting treatment; lesions covered
COVID-19 (positive test or	See Section 5.5	Per current DCYF/DOH

Symptom / Condition	Exclusion Requirement	Return Criteria
confirmed exposure)		guidance
Any condition preventing comfortable participation	Exclusion at staff discretion	Symptoms resolved; able to participate

If Your Child Becomes Ill at the Program

If a child develops any of the above symptoms during the program day, the parent or guardian will be contacted immediately. A child exhibiting a fever of 100.4°F or above, vomiting, or diarrhea must be picked up within

one (1) hour

of notification. While awaiting pick-up, the child will be cared for in a separate, supervised, comfortable space away from the general group.

5.2 Immunization Requirements and Records

In compliance with Washington State law and DCYF licensing requirements, all children enrolled at NextZen Academy must be immunized according to the schedule recommended by the Washington State Department of Health, consistent with WAC 246-105 and WAC 110-300-0242.

- A current, complete **Certificate of Immunization Status (CIS)** form must be on file before the child's first day of attendance.
- The CIS form must be updated as the child receives additional immunizations and must remain current at all times.
- **Medical exemptions:** Families seeking a medical exemption from one or more required immunizations must provide a signed statement from a licensed healthcare provider. Medical exemptions are reviewed annually.
- **Religious/Personal exemptions:** Consistent with Washington State law (post-Initiative 1552 changes), personal or philosophical exemptions are not

accepted for childcare licensing purposes. Religious exemptions require a signed, notarized exemption form per Washington State Department of Health requirements and are subject to DCYF review.

- Children who are not current on required immunizations without an approved exemption on file will not be admitted to the program until immunizations are updated.

Reference: WAC 110-300-0242 — Immunizations; WAC 246-105 — Immunization of Children in Schools and Child Care Centers

5.3 Daily Health Check Procedures

A brief visual and verbal health check is conducted by trained staff each morning at drop-off for every child. The purpose of the daily health check is to identify signs of illness or injury that may require exclusion from the program or additional attention.

During the health check, staff will observe and ask about:

- Overall appearance and behavior (unusual lethargy, irritability, or distress)
- Presence of rash, skin irritation, or visible injuries
- Signs of respiratory illness (coughing, congestion, labored breathing)
- Eye discharge or redness
- Any reported fever, vomiting, or diarrhea in the past 24 hours
- Any new medications or changes in the child's medical needs

If staff have concerns about a child's health at drop-off, they may consult with the director and, if warranted, may decline to admit the child for that day. This decision will always be made with care and compassion and communicated clearly to the family.

5.4 Medication Administration Policy Summary

NextZen Academy will administer medications to enrolled children only under the following conditions. A complete, separate Medication Administration Policy is available from the director upon request.

- A completed, current **Medication Authorization Form** must be on file, signed by both the parent/guardian and, for prescription medications, the prescribing licensed healthcare provider.
- All medications must be provided by the parent in the **original, labeled container**. No medications will be accepted in unlabeled containers, baggies, or pill organizers.
- Prescription medications must be labeled with the child's name, medication name, dosage, route, frequency, and prescribing provider's name.
- Over-the-counter medications (including sunscreen, diaper cream, and fever reducers) require a signed parental authorization form. Sunscreen provided by the parent must be non-aerosol and labeled with the child's name.
- Staff designated as medication administrators have received appropriate DCYF-required training in safe medication administration procedures.
- All medications administered will be documented in the child's medication log, including the time, dose, staff member administering, and any observed reactions.
- Expired medications will not be administered. Parents will be notified promptly to provide a current supply.
- Emergency medications (e.g., epinephrine auto-injectors for severe allergies, diastat for seizure disorders) require individual health plans developed in coordination with the child's healthcare provider and the director.

Reference: WAC 110-300-0255 — Medication records; WAC 110-300-0260 — Medication administration

5.5 COVID-19 and Communicable Disease Protocols

NextZen Academy follows current guidance from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), the Snohomish County Health Department, and DCYF for managing COVID-19 and other communicable diseases in childcare settings. Our general communicable disease protocols include:

- **COVID-19 Positive Cases:** Any child or staff member who tests positive for COVID-19 must follow current DOH isolation guidance before returning to the

program. The most current return-to-program criteria (which are updated as public health guidance evolves) will be communicated to families at the time of any confirmed case. Families are encouraged to check DOH's current childcare guidance at *doh.wa.gov*.

- **Exposure Notification:** In the event of a confirmed communicable illness (including COVID-19, influenza, RSV, norovirus, or other reportable conditions) in the program, NextZen Academy will notify all families of affected classrooms within 24 hours while protecting the privacy of the affected individual(s).
- **Enhanced Cleaning:** In the event of a communicable illness outbreak in the program, NextZen Academy will implement enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols in accordance with DOH and DCYF guidance.
- **Staff Illness:** Staff members who are ill are required to stay home and will not return to work until meeting the same or stricter return-to-work criteria applicable to enrolled children.

5.6 Reportable Illness Notification

Certain communicable diseases are designated as **reportable conditions** under Washington State law (WAC 246-101). If a confirmed reportable illness is identified in a child enrolled at NextZen Academy, the program is required to notify the Snohomish County Health District and cooperate with any public health investigation. Families will be notified of any reportable illness exposure within the program promptly and in accordance with public health guidance.

Reportable conditions include (but are not limited to): measles, mumps, pertussis (whooping cough), hepatitis A, E. coli O157:H7, Salmonella, Shigella, varicella in unusual clusters, and COVID-19 during any active state guidance period requiring reporting.

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Section 6: Nutrition & Food Service

Reference: WAC 110-300-0180 through WAC 110-300-0198 — Meals, Snacks, Food Service, and Nutrition

6.1 Meals and Snacks Provided

NextZen Academy provides nutritious meals and snacks to all enrolled children as part of the daily program. Our food service program operates in compliance with WAC 110-300-0180 (Meal and Snack Schedule) and the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern requirements. The following meals and snacks are provided based on the hours of attendance:

Meal / Snack	Approximate Time	Who Receives
Morning Snack	8:30 – 9:00 AM	All children present before 9:00 AM
Lunch	11:30 AM – 12:15 PM	All enrolled children
Afternoon Snack	3:00 – 3:30 PM	All children present after 3:00 PM
Infant Feedings	On demand / per individual feeding plan	All infants (6 weeks – 12 months)

All meals and snacks are prepared or served in compliance with CACFP meal pattern requirements, which specify minimum quantities of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and milk/dairy components. Weekly menus are posted in each classroom and available on the parent communication portal. Menu substitutions may occur due to food availability or safety reasons; families will be notified of any significant menu changes.

6.2 USDA CACFP Participation

NextZen Academy participates in the **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**. CACFP is a federally funded nutrition program that reimburses eligible childcare programs for serving nutritious meals and snacks to children in care. Participation in CACFP means that:

- All meals and snacks served must meet USDA CACFP meal pattern requirements for each age group.
- Families of eligible children may receive meal reimbursement benefits at no additional cost. Income-eligible families may apply for free or reduced-price meal benefits through the program.
- Meal counts and attendance records are maintained in compliance with USDA CACFP requirements.
- CACFP meal information, including current income eligibility guidelines, is available from the director upon request.

In accordance with USDA policy, NextZen Academy does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability in its CACFP food service operations. To file a complaint alleging discrimination in the CACFP, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410.

6.3 Food Allergy and Special Dietary Accommodation Process

NextZen Academy takes food allergies and dietary restrictions with the utmost seriousness. The safety and well-being of every child is our highest priority, and we recognize that food allergies can be life-threatening.

Reference: WAC 110-300-0186 — Food allergies and special dietary needs

The process for managing food allergies and special dietary needs is as follows:

- 12. Disclosure at Enrollment:** Parents/guardians must disclose all known food allergies, intolerances, and dietary restrictions on the child's Health History Form at enrollment.
- 13. Individual Allergy/Dietary Plan:** For children with confirmed food allergies (especially anaphylactic allergies) or medical dietary needs, NextZen Academy will develop an individual dietary plan in collaboration with the family and, when necessary, the child's healthcare provider.
- 14. Emergency Action Plan:** Children with severe food allergies must have a current, signed **Food Allergy Action Plan / Emergency Action Plan** on

file, signed by the child's licensed healthcare provider. This plan must include emergency medication instructions (e.g., epinephrine auto-injector use).

15. **Staff Training:** All staff working with children who have severe food allergies are trained in recognition of allergic reactions and use of emergency medications as directed in the individual action plan.

16. **Classroom Protocols:** Individual classroom protocols to prevent accidental exposure (e.g., designated allergy-safe tables, labeling of safe foods, restricted food items for classroom celebrations) will be implemented as appropriate.

17. **Substitute Meals:** NextZen Academy will provide appropriate, CACFP-compliant substitute foods for children who cannot consume a standard menu item due to documented allergies or medical dietary needs.

Religious dietary requirements (e.g., Halal, Kosher, vegetarian/vegan preferences) will be accommodated to the greatest extent practicable. Please speak with the director to discuss specific accommodations needed for your family.

6.4 Parent-Provided Food Guidelines

Families who wish to provide food from home for their child must adhere to the following guidelines in compliance with WAC 110-300-0190:

- All food brought from home must be clearly labeled with the child's full name and the date.
- Food brought from home must be stored in the program's designated food storage areas (refrigerator, freezer, or shelf as appropriate).
- Perishable foods that are not consumed on the day they are brought will be sent home at the end of the program day. NextZen Academy is not responsible for foods left unclaimed.
- Parents are encouraged to pack foods that meet or exceed CACFP nutritional guidelines. Meals should include a balance of protein, grains, fruits/vegetables, and dairy.

- Foods containing known allergens that could pose a risk to other children (e.g., peanut products in a classroom with a child with a severe peanut allergy) may be restricted in specific classrooms. Parents will be notified if such restrictions apply.
- Candy, gum, soda, energy drinks, and foods with excessive added sugar are discouraged and may not be served to children during the program day.
- If a parent-provided meal does not meet minimum nutritional requirements, program staff may supplement the meal with CACFP-eligible foods, as required by WAC 110-300-0190.

6.5 Infant Feeding and Formula Policy

Infant feeding is an individual, relationship-based experience. NextZen Academy is fully committed to supporting both breastfeeding and formula-feeding families. The following policies apply to infant feeding:

- **Breast Milk:** Breast milk provided by the parent must be clearly labeled with the infant's full name, the date expressed, and the volume. Breast milk must be stored in the program's designated infant refrigerator and used within published safe storage timeframes (per CDC guidelines: up to 4 days in refrigerator, up to 6 months in a deep freezer).
- **Formula:** Ready-to-feed or properly prepared powdered formula may be provided by the parent or, if the family and program agree, may be provided by the program. Formula brand and preparation instructions must be specified on the child's Infant Feeding Plan.
- **Feeding Schedules:** Infants under 12 months are fed on-demand or according to the individual feeding plan developed with the family. Staff will never force-feed an infant or require an infant to finish a bottle.
- **Introduction of Solid Foods:** Solid foods will not be introduced to infants without written authorization from the parent and documentation that the child's healthcare provider has approved the introduction. The type and texture of solid foods must be specified in the infant's feeding plan.

- **Bottle Propping:** Bottles will never be propped. All infants will be held or supported during bottle feeding.
- No honey or cow's milk will be served to infants under 12 months under any circumstances.

NextZen Academy

Section 7 — Rest & Sleep Policies

Section 7: Rest & Sleep Policies

Reference: WAC 110-300-0270 — Safe Sleep; WAC 110-300-0275 — Rest and sleep for children older than infants

7.1 Safe Sleep Standards for Infants

The safety of infants during sleep is among our most critical responsibilities. NextZen Academy strictly follows the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) safe infant sleep guidelines and WAC 110-300-0270 in all infant sleeping practices. These practices are **non-negotiable** and cannot be altered by parental request, as they are required by state law.

Safe Sleep — NextZen Academy Infant Room Policy (WAC 110-300-0270)

- **Back to sleep:** All infants under 12 months are placed on their back to sleep for every sleep, every time. Side or stomach positioning is not permitted unless a licensed healthcare provider has provided written documentation of a medical need for an alternative sleep position, and this documentation is on file.
- **Firm, flat mattress:** Infants sleep only on CPSC-approved, firm, flat sleep surfaces in an approved crib, bassinet, or play yard. Soft mattresses, pillows,

positioners, or inclined sleepers are not used.

- **No soft bedding:** Cribs and sleep surfaces are kept free of pillows, blankets, bumper pads, stuffed animals, positioners, and any other soft objects. Infants will be dressed in appropriately warm clothing (e.g., a sleep sack) rather than covered with blankets.
- **Separate sleep surfaces:** Each infant sleeps on their own individual, designated crib or sleep surface. No infant will be placed to sleep in a swing, bouncy seat, car seat (outside of a vehicle), or similar device as a routine sleep location.
- **Temperature regulation:** Infant sleep areas are maintained at a comfortable temperature. Staff monitor infants for signs of overheating.
- **No smoking:** NextZen Academy maintains a smoke-free environment at all times. No staff member who has been exposed to tobacco smoke will handle infants without first changing clothing and washing hands.

7.2 Nap Time Schedules by Age Group

Age Group	Rest / Sleep Schedule	Sleep Equipment	Notes
Infants (6wks-12mo)	On-demand; as per individual sleep plan	Assigned, labeled individual crib	Back-to-sleep always; safe sleep standards apply
Toddlers (12-36mo)	1:00 PM – 3:00 PM (approximately)	Individual labeled cot or mat with fitted sheet	Cots placed a minimum of 18 inches apart
Preschool (3-5yrs)	12:30 PM – 2:30 PM (quiet rest period)	Individual labeled cot or mat	Children not sleeping may rest quietly with a book
School Age (5-12yrs)	No scheduled nap; quiet activity period as needed	N/A	Rest options available for children who need them

Rest schedules may be adjusted to meet individual children's needs, within the framework of classroom routines. If your child has specific rest needs (e.g., a medical condition affecting sleep, a consistent home sleep schedule), please discuss them with your child's teacher so we can accommodate your child's needs as much as possible.

Families may provide a small, washable blanket or comfort item for their child's rest time (labeled clearly with the child's name). Comfort items are kept in each child's individual cubby and are not shared with other children. All bedding is laundered at least weekly and more frequently as needed.

7.3 Supervision During Rest

Children are supervised by qualified staff during all rest and sleep periods. Infants are visually checked at least every **15 minutes** while sleeping, and their sleep position and breathing are monitored continuously by the classroom team. For toddlers and preschoolers, staff remain present and awake in the room during all rest periods. Staff will never leave sleeping or resting children unattended.

Reference: WAC 110-300-0270(4) — Supervision and monitoring of sleeping infants; WAC 110-300-0225 — Supervision requirements

NextZen Academy

Section 8 — Behavior Guidance

Section 8: Behavior Guidance

Reference: WAC 110-300-0375 — Guidance and discipline; WAC 110-300-0380 — Prohibited discipline

8.1 Positive Guidance Philosophy

At NextZen Academy, we approach child behavior through the lens of development, relationships, and respect. We believe that young children are not "misbehaving" — they are communicating, learning, and practicing skills they have not yet fully mastered. Our role as educators and caregivers is to guide children toward prosocial behaviors with warmth, consistency, and intentionality.

Our positive guidance approach is grounded in the following principles:

- **Prevention first:** Thoughtfully designed environments, predictable routines, and engaging activities prevent the majority of challenging behaviors before they occur.
- **Teach, don't punish:** When a child exhibits challenging behavior, we view it as a teaching opportunity. We help children name their feelings, understand the impact of their actions, and practice better strategies.
- **Consistency and follow-through:** Clear, age-appropriate expectations are communicated to children in positive terms (what to do, not just what not to do) and applied consistently by all staff.
- **Relationship as the tool:** The relationship between a child and their caregiver is our most powerful tool for supporting behavior. Children who feel safe, seen, and connected are more able to regulate their emotions and behavior.
- **Culturally responsive practice:** We recognize that behavior and its expression are influenced by cultural norms and family backgrounds. We approach all guidance with cultural humility and respect.

8.2 Guidance Strategies Used at NextZen Academy

- Positive reinforcement — acknowledging and celebrating positive behaviors and efforts
- Redirection — gently guiding a child toward an appropriate alternative activity or behavior
- Natural and logical consequences — age-appropriate, related consequences that help children understand cause and effect
- Problem-solving conversations — helping children identify the problem, generate solutions, and evaluate outcomes (primarily for preschool and school-age children)
- Choice-offering — empowering children with two appropriate choices to support autonomy and cooperation

- Brief, calm time-away (not isolation or punishment) — providing a child a voluntary, supportive opportunity to calm their body in a designated comfortable space within the classroom
- Environmental modifications — adjusting the physical environment or schedule to better support a child's individual needs
- Collaborative planning with families — partnering with parents/guardians to develop consistent strategies across home and school

8.3 Prohibited Discipline

NextZen Academy strictly prohibits all forms of discipline that are harmful, humiliating, or developmentally inappropriate. The following disciplinary actions are **absolutely prohibited** at NextZen Academy by state law and program policy:

Prohibited Discipline Practices (WAC 110-300-0380)

- Corporal punishment of any kind, including hitting, spanking, slapping, shaking, pinching, or any other physical force used as discipline
- Emotional abuse, including shaming, humiliating, threatening, ridiculing, or using language that demeans a child
- Withholding food, water, or access to the bathroom as punishment
- Confining a child in a closet, locked space, box, or any area from which they cannot exit
- Binding, restraining, or restricting a child's freedom of movement as punishment
- Subjecting a child to frightening or intimidating discipline practices
- Forcing a child to eat or denying a child access to a meal or snack as punishment
- Punishing a group of children for the behavior of one child (group

punishment)

- Delegating discipline to other children

Any staff member found to have used prohibited discipline is subject to immediate removal from child contact and possible termination of employment, in addition to mandatory reporting to DCYF. Parents who observe or suspect prohibited discipline are encouraged to report their concerns to the director and/or to DCYF directly (see Section 10 for contact information).

8.4 Conflict Resolution and Redirection Approaches

When conflicts arise between children — which is developmentally normal, especially in the toddler and preschool years — staff are trained to intervene calmly and to use the conflict as a teaching opportunity. Our conflict resolution approach includes:

- **Acknowledge feelings:** Staff help each child involved name and validate their feelings ("You're upset because you wanted that toy, too.").
- **State the problem:** The situation is described simply and neutrally ("You both want the same truck.").
- **Generate solutions together:** Children are supported in generating ideas for solving the problem, with staff providing guided choices as needed.
- **Support and follow-up:** Staff remain nearby to support the implementation of the chosen solution and offer encouragement.

Persistent or escalating behavioral challenges that may require more intensive support will prompt a conference with the family. NextZen Academy may also, in consultation with the family, refer a child for developmental assessment or connect the family with community behavioral health resources through local Snohomish County early intervention services.

Section 9: Curriculum & Daily Activities

9.1 Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum Overview

NextZen Academy uses a play-based, integrated curriculum approach aligned with the **Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDG)** and NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice frameworks. Our curriculum is not a rigid, scripted program but a dynamic, responsive approach that honors each child's unique learning style, pace, and interests.

Learning is organized around six interconnected developmental domains:

- **Social-Emotional Development:** Building self-regulation, empathy, relationship skills, and a positive sense of identity
- **Language and Literacy:** Oral language, vocabulary, early literacy concepts, phonological awareness, and a love of books and stories
- **Cognitive Development and General Knowledge:** Problem-solving, mathematical thinking, scientific inquiry, and conceptual understanding of the world
- **Physical Development and Health:** Gross motor skills, fine motor skills, health habits, and body awareness
- **Creative Arts and Expression:** Music, movement, visual arts, dramatic play, and imaginative expression
- **Approaches to Learning:** Curiosity, persistence, flexibility, creativity, and the habits of mind that support lifelong learning

Teachers plan curriculum intentionally, documenting observations of each child and using those observations to inform learning experiences. Portfolios of each child's work and development are maintained and shared with families at regular intervals (see Section 10).

9.2 Daily Schedule by Age Group

Time	Infant Room	Toddler Room	Preschool Room	School Age
6:30–8:30 AM	Arrival, individual care	Arrival, free play	Arrival, choice centers	Arrival, before-school care
8:30–9:00 AM	Feeding / morning routine	Morning snack	Morning snack & circle	School departure
9:00–10:30 AM	Sensory / tummy time / play	Structured play & centers	Learning centers & small group	—
10:30–11:30 AM	Outdoor time (weather permitting)	Outdoor play	Outdoor play / gross motor	—
11:30 AM–12:15 PM	Feeding & diapering	Lunch	Lunch	—
12:15–1:00 PM	Individual nap / quiet play	Naptime preparation	Quiet activities, story	—
1:00–3:00 PM	Sleep (on demand)	Nap / rest period	Rest / quiet reading	—
3:00–3:30 PM	Feeding / waking routines	Afternoon snack	Afternoon snack	After-school arrival & snack
3:30–5:00 PM	Play, sensory, language	Structured play & outdoor	Project time / outdoor	Homework time, enrichment
5:00–6:00 PM	Individual care, departure prep	Quiet play, departures	Free choice, departures	Free play, departures

Schedules are approximate and may be adjusted based on weather, special events, individual children's needs, and classroom dynamics. Updated schedules are posted in each classroom.

9.3 Outdoor Play and Physical Activity

NextZen Academy believes strongly in the importance of outdoor play and physical activity for young children's health, development, and well-being. In compliance with WAC 110-300-0145 and program policy:

- Children ages 12 months and older are provided a minimum of **60 minutes of outdoor play** per full-program day, weather permitting.
- Outdoor play may be adjusted for extreme weather conditions (temperatures below 25°F or above 90°F, lightning, heavy precipitation, or poor air quality). Indoor gross motor alternatives are provided on inclement weather days.
- Our outdoor play spaces are age-appropriate, enclosed, and inspected daily before use for safety hazards.
- Appropriate outdoor clothing and footwear are the family's responsibility. Please ensure your child is dressed for the weather each day. Extra layers are encouraged in colder months.
- Sunscreen (provided by the family, non-aerosol, SPF 30 or higher) will be applied before outdoor time when UV index is 3 or above, per an authorization form on file.

9.4 Screen Time Policy

Reference: WAC 110-300-0155 — Use of television, video, and computers

NextZen Academy's screen time policy prioritizes active, hands-on, relationship-based learning over passive media consumption. Our policy is aligned with both WAC 110-300-0155 and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) screen time guidelines:

- **Children under 2 years of age:** No screen time of any kind, except brief video calling with family members (e.g., a parent connecting from a distance), as permitted by individual family authorization.
- **Children ages 2-5 years:** Screen time is limited to a maximum of **30 minutes per week** within the program. Any screen time used must be high-quality, educational, and interactive; it must be used as a teaching tool, not as entertainment or a babysitting substitute.
- **Children ages 5 and older (School Age):** Screen time in the program is limited to educational purposes (e.g., homework support, age-appropriate

learning programs) and is supervised. Total recreational screen time within the program is limited to 30 minutes per day.

- All screen content used in the program is reviewed and approved by the director for age-appropriateness, educational value, and alignment with NAEYC and AAP guidelines.
- Screens are **never** used during meals, snacks, or outdoor time.
- A log of all screen time used in the program is maintained and is available to families upon request.

9.5 Developmental Screening

Reference: WAC 110-300-0055 — Developmental screening and communication to parents or guardians

NextZen Academy is committed to supporting early identification of developmental concerns, which is one of the most important contributions a quality early childhood program can make to a child's long-term well-being. In compliance with WAC 110-300-0055:

- NextZen Academy conducts a **standardized developmental screening** for enrolled children using an approved developmental screening tool (such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, ASQ-3, or ASQ:SE-2) within the first 60 days of enrollment and thereafter at intervals aligned with the child's developmental stage.
- Screening results are shared with parents/guardians in a private, supportive conversation. Families receive a copy of the screening results.
- If a developmental screening suggests that a child may benefit from further evaluation, staff will share this information with the family sensitively and provide information about referral options, including the local school district's **Child Find** program (Everett Public Schools or Snohomish School District), Early Intervention (Birth to Three) through DCYF, and Snohomish County community resources.

- Developmental screening at NextZen Academy is a support tool, not a diagnosis. Screening identifies children who may benefit from further professional evaluation — it does not diagnose developmental conditions.
- Families have the right to decline developmental screening for their child. If you wish to decline or have questions about the screening process, please speak with the director.

NextZen Academy

Section 10 — Communication & Family Engagement

Section 10: Communication & Family Engagement

Reference: WAC 110-300-0080 — Family support self-assessment; WAC 110-300-0085 — Family partnerships and communication

10.1 Parent-Teacher Communication Methods

We believe that open, honest, and frequent communication between families and our staff is essential to every child's well-being and success. NextZen Academy uses multiple channels to keep families informed and connected:

- **Daily Verbal Check-In:** Teachers are available at drop-off and pick-up for brief (2–3 minute) updates about the child's day. For more in-depth conversations, please schedule a conference.
- **Family Communication App / Parent Portal:** We use a secure, encrypted family communication platform to share daily activity reports, photos, milestone notes, and general program announcements. Families receive login credentials at enrollment.

- **Daily Activity Reports:** Each child receives a daily summary noting meals, sleep, diapering/toileting (where applicable), activities participated in, and any notable observations or events.
- **Monthly Newsletters:** A classroom newsletter is published monthly with updates on curriculum themes, upcoming events, developmental tips for families, and community resources.
- **Parent-Teacher Conferences:** Formal conferences are offered twice per program year (fall and spring) to discuss each child's developmental progress, share portfolio observations, and set collaborative goals. Additional conferences may be scheduled at any time by either the family or the staff.
- **Director Communication:** The director is available by appointment, phone, or email for any questions, concerns, or conversations that go beyond the classroom level.
- **Posted Notices:** Regulatory notices, classroom schedules, staff names, licensing information, and required postings are displayed prominently at the program entrance and in each classroom.

10.2 Family Engagement Activities and Events

NextZen Academy views families as irreplaceable partners in their children's learning. We create multiple opportunities throughout the year for families to connect with our program, their child's teachers, and one another:

- **Family Orientation Night:** Held each fall (and for new families at enrollment), this event introduces families to classroom teachers, curriculum, and program routines.
- **Classroom Volunteer Opportunities:** Families are invited to share a skill, hobby, cultural tradition, or story with their child's classroom group by scheduling a visit with the teacher. All visiting adults must complete a background check authorization in advance per DCYF requirements.
- **Cultural Celebrations:** We honor and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of our families through intentional, respectful classroom

activities, storytelling, music, and shared meals. Families are encouraged to share their traditions with us.

- **Family Resource Library:** NextZen Academy maintains a lending library of books and resources on parenting, child development, and family wellness available to all enrolled families at no cost.
- **Annual Family Picnic / Celebration:** Each spring, we host a program-wide celebration where families, children, and staff come together as a community.
- **Parent Advisory Input:** Families are invited to provide input on program policies, curriculum, and services through periodic surveys and informal feedback conversations. We actively use family feedback to improve our program.

Reference: WAC 110-300-0065 — School readiness and family engagement activities

10.3 Grievance and Complaint Procedure

NextZen Academy is committed to resolving all concerns promptly, fairly, and respectfully. If a family has a concern or complaint about any aspect of the program, we encourage the following steps:

18. **Step 1 — Direct Communication:** Raise the concern directly with the classroom teacher or the director in person, by phone, or in writing. Most concerns can be resolved quickly at this level.
19. **Step 2 — Director Meeting:** If the concern is not resolved at Step 1, request a formal meeting with the director. The director will respond in writing within five (5) business days of the meeting.
20. **Step 3 — DCYF Complaint:** If a family believes their concern involves a violation of state licensing requirements (WAC 110-300) and is not satisfactorily resolved through Steps 1 and 2, they have the right to file a complaint directly with the Washington State DCYF Licensing Division.

Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

Early Learning Licensing Division

Phone: 1-844-663-4357 (DCYF)

Website: *dcyf.wa.gov*

To report child abuse or neglect: **1-866-ENDHARM (1-866-363-4276)**

10.4 Access to Licensing Records

In compliance with WAC 110-300-0035 and the Washington State public records law, parents/guardians and the public have the right to inspect NextZen Academy's current DCYF license, licensing inspection reports, and any corrective action plans on file. These records are:

- Available for review at the program upon request. Please ask the director.
- Accessible through the Washington State DCYF public childcare licensing lookup tool at *dcyf.wa.gov*.
- The current program license is posted prominently at the program entrance.

NextZen Academy

Section 11 — Safety & Emergency Procedures

Section 11: Safety & Emergency Procedures

Reference: WAC 110-300-0165 — Safety requirements; WAC 110-300-0166 — Emergency preparation and exiting

11.1 Child Sign-In/Sign-Out Procedures

Secure sign-in and sign-out procedures are fundamental to child safety at NextZen Academy. In compliance with WAC 110-300-0165:

- Every child must be **signed in** upon arrival by the accompanying authorized adult. The sign-in log records the child's name, time of arrival, and the adult's printed name and signature.
- Every child must be **signed out** upon departure by the authorized adult receiving the child. The sign-out log records the time of departure and the adult's signature.
- Sign-in/sign-out logs are reviewed daily by the director or designee and are maintained in the child's file for a minimum of 12 months.
- Staff perform regular attendance counts throughout the day and whenever children move between spaces (indoors to outdoors, classroom to dining area, etc.).
- Children are never left unsupervised, and staff-to-child ratios are maintained at all times, including during transitions.

11.2 Emergency Contact and Authorization

Up-to-date emergency contact information is essential to our ability to respond effectively in any emergency situation. Families must ensure the following:

- A minimum of **two emergency contacts** (in addition to the primary parent/guardian) are on file for each enrolled child.
- At least one emergency contact must be reachable by phone during program hours.
- Emergency contact information must be updated whenever there is any change (new phone number, change of contact person, etc.).
- Emergency contacts must be authorized to pick up the child and are subject to the same ID verification requirements as authorized pick-up individuals.

- Emergency contacts will be called in the order listed if the primary parent/guardian cannot be reached.

11.3 Emergency Evacuation and Drill Procedures

NextZen Academy maintains a comprehensive Emergency Preparedness Plan in compliance with WAC 110-300-0166. This plan covers procedures for fire evacuation, shelter-in-place (tornado, severe weather, lockdown), and other emergencies. Key elements include:

- **Fire Evacuation Drills:** Fire evacuation drills are conducted a minimum of **one time per month** as required by Washington State law. Drill dates and participation records are maintained in the program's safety log.
- **Emergency Meeting Location:** Each classroom has a designated primary and secondary evacuation meeting point outside the building. Evacuation routes are posted in each room.
- **Emergency Go-Bags:** Each classroom maintains an emergency go-bag containing children's emergency contact information, first aid supplies, medications for children with chronic conditions, water, and other essential items.
- **Lockdown/Shelter-in-Place:** In the event of a community emergency requiring shelter-in-place or lockdown, NextZen Academy will follow protocols in coordination with local law enforcement. Families will be notified via the parent communication app and/or direct phone call as soon as it is safe to do so.
- **Reunification:** In the event children must be evacuated to an off-site location, families will be notified immediately with the reunification address. Children will only be released to authorized adults with verified ID.
- **Utility Emergencies:** In the event of a power outage, water outage, or heating/cooling failure, NextZen Academy will contact DCYF and notify families. Depending on the duration and conditions, early pick-up or program closure may be required.

- **First Aid and CPR:** At least one staff member with current First Aid and CPR certification is present in the program at all times, in compliance with WAC 110-300-0105.

11.4 Injury and Incident Notification

In the event of a child injury or incident during the program day, NextZen Academy follows the procedures below:

- Minor injuries (scrapes, bumps) are treated by trained staff using standard first aid procedures. An **Incident/Injury Report** is completed documenting the nature of the injury, how it occurred, first aid provided, and staff present.
- The parent/guardian is informed of any injury or incident at pick-up, or sooner if the injury requires more than routine first aid.
- Injuries requiring medical attention beyond first aid will result in an immediate phone call to the parent/guardian. If the parent cannot be reached, emergency contacts will be called. For serious or life-threatening injuries, 911 will be called immediately.
- A copy of all Incident/Injury Reports is provided to the parent/guardian at pick-up, and the parent is asked to sign the report acknowledging receipt. A copy is retained in the child's file.
- Serious injuries or incidents (as defined by WAC 110-300-0165 and DCYF guidance) are reported to DCYF within required timeframes. These include but are not limited to: injuries requiring emergency medical treatment, hospitalizations, or any incident involving a child's unexplained injury.

Section 12: Transportation

12.1 Program Transportation Policy

NextZen Academy does not provide routine transportation to or from children's homes or schools as part of its standard program offering. **Families are responsible for transporting their children to and from the program** each day during scheduled program hours.

In the event that NextZen Academy arranges transportation for any program purpose (such as field trips), the following standards apply:

- All transportation will be provided by a licensed, insured carrier or in program vehicles meeting all applicable Washington State vehicle safety and licensing requirements.
- All drivers transporting children on behalf of the program must have a valid Washington State driver's license, a satisfactory driving record, and a completed DCYF background clearance.
- All children will be transported in properly installed, age- and weight-appropriate car seats or booster seats as required by Washington State law (RCW 46.61.687).
- Children will never be left unattended in a vehicle.
- A staff member will conduct a complete vehicle inspection (including check of all seats) at the beginning and end of each transport to ensure no child is left behind.

If NextZen Academy operates any school-age before/after-school transportation for pick-up or drop-off from local elementary schools, specific transportation schedules, routes, and procedures will be provided to affected families separately. Please inquire with the director for current school-age transportation availability.

12.2 Field Trip Permission Process

NextZen Academy may periodically plan off-site field trips as extensions of classroom learning. Field trips are developmentally appropriate, educational, and supervised. The following process applies to all field trips:

- Families will receive a written **Field Trip Permission Notice** at least two (2) weeks in advance of the trip. This notice will include the destination, date and time, mode of transportation, educational purpose, required clothing/items, and any applicable fees.
- A completed and signed **Field Trip Permission Form** from the parent/guardian is required before a child may participate in any off-site trip. Verbal permission is not accepted.
- Children whose families do not return a signed permission form will not participate in the field trip and will remain at the program in supervised alternative activities.
- Field trips are designed to maintain required staff-to-child ratios at or below program standards, and additional qualified chaperones may be arranged as needed.
- Emergency contact information and relevant medical/allergy information is carried on all field trips by the lead staff member.
- A general field trip consent form included in the enrollment packet does **not** replace the need for a specific signed permission form for each individual field trip.

NextZen Academy

Section 13 — Photographs & Media

Section 13: Photographs & Media

13.1 Photo and Social Media Consent Policy

NextZen Academy captures photographs and video of children throughout the program day to document learning, celebrate milestones, and support family

engagement through daily reports and classroom documentation. We take our responsibility to protect children's privacy and digital safety very seriously.

Upon enrollment, families are asked to complete a **Photo and Media Release Form** indicating their consent preferences. The following options are available:

Use Type	Description	Consent Required
Internal Program Use	Photos used within the program for learning documentation, portfolios, and display in the child's classroom	Yes — separate consent line
Secure Parent Communication App	Photos shared with the child's enrolled family through the program's secure, password-protected family portal (visible only to the child's family)	Yes — separate consent line
Program Promotional Materials	Photos used in printed brochures, program newsletters, or program website (without child's full name)	Yes — separate consent line
Social Media (Program Accounts)	Photos posted to NextZen Academy's official, public social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) — always without the child's last name or personally identifying information	Yes — separate consent line

Families may grant or withhold consent for any category independently. Consent may be withdrawn at any time in writing. Withdrawal of consent for a future category does not require removal of previously published materials, but NextZen Academy will respect family requests to remove or archive materials wherever technically possible.



Children Under Protective Orders / Custody Restrictions

If your child is subject to any safety plan, protection order, or custody arrangement that restricts the publication of the child's image or location, you must inform the director immediately and in writing. NextZen Academy will honor all documented restrictions without exception. No child's image will ever be published with location-specific details or in a manner that could compromise their safety.

13.2 Photography by Families at the Program

- Families are warmly welcomed to photograph their own child during authorized program events, classroom visits, and celebrations.
- Out of respect for other enrolled children and their families' privacy preferences, **photographs taken at program events should not include other children's faces** in any images shared publicly (social media, community groups, etc.) without the explicit consent of those children's families.
- Photographing or recording other children at the program without staff knowledge is not permitted and will be addressed by the director.

NextZen Academy

Section 14 — Privacy & Records

Section 14: Privacy & Records

14.1 Confidentiality of Child and Family Records

NextZen Academy maintains strict confidentiality of all child and family records in compliance with applicable state and federal privacy principles, including those reflected in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Health

Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) as applicable to health information, and Washington State law.

Child and family records maintained by NextZen Academy include:

- Enrollment application and contact forms
- Health and immunization records
- Medication authorization forms and administration logs
- Incident and injury reports
- Developmental screening results and observation documentation
- Attendance and sign-in/sign-out logs
- Financial and tuition records
- Correspondence between the program and the family
- Custody and authorization documentation

All records are stored securely — paper records in locked filing cabinets and digital records in access-controlled, password-protected systems. Records are never shared with third parties without written consent from the parent/guardian, except as required by law (e.g., DCYF licensing inspections, mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect, or subpoena).

Staff are trained in confidentiality requirements and are prohibited from discussing children's personal or health information in areas where other families or members of the public may overhear.

14.2 Access to Records Policy

The following individuals and entities have access to child records as described:

Who	Access	Conditions
Parent or Legal Guardian	Full access to their own child's records	Available upon request; copies provided within 5 business days
NextZen Academy Staff	Access on a need-to-know basis	Only the records necessary for care and safety of the individual child

Who	Access	Conditions
DCYF Licensing Staff	Access during licensing inspections	As required by WAC 110-300-0035
Law Enforcement / Child Protective Services	Access as legally mandated	Pursuant to valid legal process or mandatory reporting obligations
Third Parties (providers, agencies, etc.)	Access with written parental consent only	Release of Information form required; specific records and purpose identified

14.3 Record Retention

NextZen Academy retains child records in compliance with DCYF licensing requirements and Washington State public records law. In general:

- Enrollment records, health records, and incident/injury reports are retained for a minimum of **three (3) years** following the child's last day of enrollment, or as otherwise required by applicable law.
- Financial records are retained for a minimum of **five (5) years**.
- Upon request after a child has been disenrolled, copies of the child's records will be provided to the parent/guardian within a reasonable timeframe.

14.4 Mandatory Reporting

All NextZen Academy staff are designated **mandatory reporters** under Washington State law (RCW 26.44). Any staff member who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has experienced abuse or neglect is legally required to report their suspicion to the Washington State DCYF Child Protective Services (CPS) immediately, regardless of whether the suspected abuse occurred at the program. This reporting obligation supersedes any confidentiality or privacy policies. NextZen Academy cooperates fully with all CPS and law enforcement investigations.

NextZen Academy

Section 15: Acknowledgment & Signature Page

Required: Parent/Guardian Acknowledgment of Receipt

Please read the following statement carefully. By signing below, you confirm that you have received, read, and understood the NextZen Academy Parent

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Family Handbook for Program Year 2026–2027, and you agree to comply with all policies and procedures contained herein. This signed form must be submitted to the program director before your child's first day of attendance.

15.1 Handbook Acknowledgment Statement

I/We, the undersigned parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) of the child named below, hereby acknowledge and confirm the following:

21. I/We have received a copy of the NextZen Academy Parent & Family Handbook, Program Year 2026–2027.
22. I/We have read and understand all policies and procedures contained in this handbook, including but not limited to: enrollment and admission requirements, tuition and fee policies, health and illness exclusion criteria, safe sleep standards, behavior guidance policies, emergency procedures, and privacy/record policies.
23. I/We agree to comply with the policies and procedures described in this handbook for the duration of my/our child's enrollment at NextZen Academy.
24. I/We understand that NextZen Academy is licensed by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) under WAC 110-300 —

Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs, and that I/we have the right to review the program's current license and licensing inspection records at any time.

25. I/We understand that I/we have the right to file a complaint about this program with DCYF if I/we believe that state licensing requirements have been violated.

26. I/We understand that this handbook is subject to annual review and update, and that I/we will be notified of any material changes with at least 30 days written notice.

27. I/We understand that the withdrawal notice requirement is a minimum of two (2) weeks written notice, and that registration and supply fees are non-refundable.

15.2 Child Information

Field	Information
Child's Full Legal Name	
Child's Date of Birth	
Child's Program Room / Age Group	
Enrollment Start Date	

15.3 Parent / Guardian Signatures

Parent / Guardian 1

Signature of Parent / Guardian 1

Printed Full Name

Date

Relationship to Child (e.g., Mother, Father, Legal Guardian)

Parent / Guardian 2 (if applicable)

Signature of Parent / Guardian 2

Printed Full Name

Date

Relationship to Child (e.g., Mother, Father, Legal Guardian)

NextZen Academy Director / Authorized Program Representative

Signature of Program Director / Authorized Representative

Printed Full Name and Title

Date

Document Information

Program: NextZen Academy | Mill Creek East, Snohomish County, Washington State

Document: Parent & Family Handbook | Program Year 2026–2027

Effective Date: June 23, 2026

Governing Regulation: WAC 110-300 — Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs

Licensing Authority: Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

Review Schedule: Annually, or as required by regulatory updates

Next Scheduled Review: June 2027

This handbook supersedes all prior editions. Families will be notified in writing of any amendments. A current copy is available at the program at all times and on the family communication portal.

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Prepared in compliance with WAC 110-300 (DCYF Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs)