

Ruffin Ridley Extended Day Program

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A message from the Ruffin Ridley Extended Day Program (RREDP) Parent Board:

We are excited to be opening our application process for the upcoming school year and are looking forward to welcoming new children and families into our engaging program with dedicated teachers. At the same time, we recognize the ongoing need in our community for additional after school child care options and we continue to work with our program Executive Director, the Florida Ruffin Ridley School (FRR) administration, and the Town of Brookline to identify ways of potentially increasing our capacity. This is not an easy task as we are an independent entity and program from FRR and the Town of Brookline, which means we have different constraints and challenges we face each year. As you apply for a space in our program, we want to help you understand some of these challenges we face in being unable to accept all children into the program, as well as how our application process works.

- **Overall program limits based on state regulations**

As an independent early childhood education program, RREDP is regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and subject to specific state regulations. Under the state regulations, the program must follow standards related to indoor space and minimum staff to child ratios. For example, the program is required to provide a minimum of 35 square feet of activity space per child (equaling over 4000 square feet for all of RREDP) that is apart from other groups that may be using the facility during the program's operating hours. This space is required to be available to the children for at least half of the program day. It also must accommodate a variety of activities, as well as provide space for all children who are present playing individually, together, and in small or large groups. The program also must employ staff that meet certain educational requirements, including a bachelor's degree or associate's degree for group leader or higher positions, as well as minimum amounts of work experience. Further, the program is required to employ a minimum amount of staff that enables adequate supervision of the children at all times, provides individual attention to children, and promotes their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.

- **Our application and placement process**

Each year during our open application process, we receive on average approximately 100 applications across all grade levels (K-4). For kindergarten, we receive an average of 45 to 50 applications annually with a total of 24 accepted into the program via a lottery or a

current sibling in the program. Each year, siblings of existing students that will continue to be enrolled in the program for the following school year, are immediately placed into the program. For kindergarten, non-siblings that submit an application during our open application period, are all placed into a lottery and picked at random for placement into the program. Once the cohort is filled, the lottery continues to determine the order of the waitlist. For grades 1-4, there exists a waitlist from prior years that is maintained and updated. Children currently on the wait list must submit a new application during the open application period to maintain their spot on the waitlist. Any new applicants in these grades are put into a lottery to determine their placement on the existing waitlist. On average, 10 individuals join the program from the waitlist across grades 1-4 each year.

- **Staffing and logistical challenges**

RREDP has always sought to hire teachers of the highest quality to ensure our children all have an enriching and caring environment to come to after school. Our teachers are part-time employees and many use this as a stepping stone to full-time education positions. Because we are seeking a high caliber of teachers to not only meet but exceed the state requirements and this is a part-time position, our recruiting takes time and sources from a small pool of in-demand candidates. Since the pandemic, our recruiting has faced many challenges and only in the last two school years has the program reached a level of being fully staffed with a goal of being overstaffed to help in planning for potential departures. These recruiting challenges can make increasing the size of the program difficult to maintain compliance with state regulations. Expanding the amount of children in the program is further compromised by our space limitations. We are not the only program operating in FRR after school, such as but not limited to FRR sports (basketball, volleyball, track) and special programs, DASEP, Steps to Success, Brookline Music School, PSB Music Program and PTO programming. These programs can make it more challenging to meet the state requirements of having dedicated space that is not shared with other programs. Additionally, despite having daily designated spaces for RREDP in the school, our spaces are frequently disrupted by school and non-school events/activities that are approved and administered by the Town of Brookline. These challenges with our space can create many last minute changes to our daily planning and potentially create safety and security issues, such as who is being allowed into the building and who is responsible for the entry of individuals into the building.

The mission of our after school program remains the same as it was at the start over 50 years ago. The purpose of RREDP is to provide supervised recreation for elementary school children in an environment that is nurturing, supportive of cognitive development and is developmentally appropriate. RREDP is responsive to children's individual needs and supports the development of self-esteem, self-expression, autonomy, and social competence. Our Parent Board works diligently to support this mission and to make the program available to as many children as it can while maintaining the safety, security, and engagement that makes our program successful.