

# 1ST CHURCH PRESCHOOL

A Morning & Full Day Program  
For 3, 4, & 5 Year Olds

*"Learning By Experiencing"*

## Curriculum



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# 1<sup>st</sup> Church Preschool Curriculum

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Our integrated curriculum is guided by *The Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS)*. It offers opportunities for exploring, learning and skill development in the areas of language, literacy, cognition, creative arts, science, social studies, mathematics, health, safety, social-emotional and physical development. Children are exposed to a diverse array of activities. They follow their own interests and when ready, they are encouraged and supported to explore unfamiliar activities to expand their interests and experiences. Children are encouraged to make choices and to participate in a range of activities that include block building, dramatic play, indoor climbing, crayons and paint, water and sand play, play-dough and clay, reading and listening to stories, music and movement, puzzles and manipulatives, cooking, and caring for plants and animals. Outdoor activities include swings and climbers, sand and digging boxes, water tables, tricycles, a playhouse, open space and gardens.

Teachers organize the daily schedule to be predictable yet flexible and organize the classroom space to provide children with opportunities for working and playing individually, in pairs and in small and whole groups. A variety of materials and open-ended activities encourage exploration, experimentation and discovery while promoting skills such as problem-solving, artistic expression, small and large muscle control, visual and auditory discrimination, hand-eye coordination, and knowledge of the world. Our curriculum is implemented in a manner that reflects sensitivity to a child's family values, beliefs and home language. Teachers plan lessons accordingly so children can revisit materials and experiences and modify materials and teaching strategies to meet each child's needs.

Although we feel it is important that there is no required sequence of units in our curriculum, teachers do plan activities around themes inspired by children's general experiences and developmental concerns. These themes are also inspired by observation of the seasons as well as events in a child's life, such as setting up a doctor's office in the dramatic play area or perhaps bringing in suitcases for packing when families are taking trips or moving. We strive to provide a safe environment in which children can feel good about themselves, develop respect and pleasure in relationships with others, and feel comfortable at school while away from home. Teachers will work with parents and, when necessary, will obtain parent permission to consult with our school consultants, the Darcey School Early Intervention Team or other appropriate outside services to develop and implement strategies and accommodations for children with special needs or as identified in their IFSP's and IEP's.

## Language and Literacy Development

Language and literacy development is an integral part of our program. Through intentionally planned activities and play experiences, we create a literacy-rich environment to support the development of language, communication and literacy skills. We provide hands on experiences to facilitate an understanding of concepts such as spelling, recognition of written letters and words. We do not formally teach written letters or written words to three and four-year-old children, instead, we offer an abundance of purposeful reading and writing provided through play experiences. Oral communication and vocabulary building is emphasized as children learn to talk

and listen to each other; share feelings, ideas and information; enjoy books by “reading” and being read to; and by acting out and retelling stories. Children experience written language as they visit the art or writing centers, order from menus in restaurant play, read recipes when cooking, or use writing boards and appointment books for office and doctor play. These experiences prepare children for later formal mastery of the alphabet along with reading and writing skills.

## **Use of Symbols**

At the start of our program, children choose a symbol that they use to represent themselves. Children quickly learn their own and everyone else's symbol. The symbol is paired with their name, which helps to develop name recognition. They recognize it as a beginning of symbolic language and a representational system at school. Eventually, the pictures become easy for them to duplicate and become a successful writing experience in preparation for later letter writing.

## **Books**

Books provide a vast source of information. Exposure to a variety of literature gives children a greater understanding of their world. Books can also help children clarify their feelings and concerns by describing situations, which are similar to their own. They provide opportunities to experience a variety of viewpoints and foster an appreciation for all cultures and backgrounds. At an age of rapidly developing language development, books contribute to word and concept recognition. Children gain a sense of mastery as they "read" a familiar book on their own, telling the story from memory. Familiarity with books contributes significantly to children's motivation to learn to read. It also strengthens the concept that things written down have meaning, which is the beginning of literacy and so important today, in a technology based world.

## **Calendar**

A horizontal calendar (linear calendar) is used in our preschool classrooms. This type of calendar introduces children to the left to right progression which they will later use in reading. This linear representation helps children to more easily understand the progression of time as it allows for ease of following the sequence of numbers on a single line.

As children count each passing day, they develop 1-to-1 correspondence skills, symbol number recognition, as well as a concrete understanding of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Spaces marked with a house are "home days" or the weekend, and additional events that are significant to the children are also recorded on the calendar. Each day, one child has the job of calendar helper at group meeting time.

## **Manipulatives, Games and Puzzles**

Manipulative materials, games and puzzles provide children with experiences in problem solving, spatial relations, decision making, observation, sorting, categorizing, comparing, estimating, part/whole relationships, matching, designs and patterns, shape and form, sequencing, one-to-one correspondence, eye-hand coordination, similarities and differences, number and size. Working alone and with others, manipulative materials offer children a chance to complete tasks in very concrete ways as well as a chance for open-ended play which encourages original

thinking, creativity, and experimentation. As children become more capable, the number of materials available increase and become more complex and challenging. These materials develop readiness skills and concepts that will be the building blocks for later success in their formal school experience.

## **Unit Blocks**

Block building offers children the opportunity to become a mathematician, stage designer, storyteller and architect, while discovering the concepts of counting, patterning, shape, symmetry, size, balance, and stability. Block building also affords the child the opportunity to work cooperatively with classmates enhancing their ability to problem-solve while using their imagination and creativity. Blocks offer an infinite variety of expressive opportunities from floor patterns or designs to incredible engineering feats of tower building.

## **Big Blocks and Dramatic Play**

Dramatic play allows children to work through their own understandings, perceptions, feelings, and fantasies of the world through imaginary play. By trying on roles during play, children learn about the social world, what people do, where they work, and how they interact. During the year, props in this area will vary, giving children a chance to explore various roles and social situations. Some examples are a doctor's office, grocery store, restaurant, post office, construction site, etc. Children also are exposed to and have opportunities to learn the appropriate vocabulary and skills that may be involved in these situations. The use of large wooden hollow blocks promotes strength and development of large muscles while enhancing and encouraging dramatic pretend play, spatial awareness and social interactions.

## **Sand and Water Play**

Through mixing, digging, filling, emptying, pouring, patting, sifting, and molding with sand, children learn about continuous quantity, texture, and physical attributes. Like many materials which are available in our program, sand is an open-ended, sensory material lending itself to exploration, experimentation, and discovery. As children try their ideas over and over, they begin to see relationships, many of which are the basis to understanding math and science concepts. Sand play promotes imaginary play and allows children to act out their experiences in the world through activities such as making roads and tunnels or cooking in the sand kitchen.

Water is a natural and absorbing medium for play. This sensory material has a wonderfully calming effect on young children who are feeling anxious or stressed. With water, children can explore scientific concepts such as measuring, pouring, floating and sinking, dry and wet, absorption, and temperature change. Children can also engage in dramatic play when bubbles, sponges, dolls, boats, whales, or dishes are added to the water play. This type of imaginative play develops vocabulary, turn taking, problem-solving, and develops a sense of community with others.

## **Art**

Through art, children begin to represent their world as they problem-solve, express their thoughts, feelings, and individuality. In a developmental art program, activities focus more on the

process rather than the final product. Children develop a sense of self-esteem that comes with accomplishment, imagination that comes with experimentation, and motor control that comes with practice. Fine motor coordination and finger strength develop as children paint, draw, sculpt, cut and paste. They also learn about color, form, texture, and pattern while increasing readiness skills for later academic success.

We provide daily opportunities which motivate and challenge children to explore a variety of art media utilizing a wide selection of materials. We encourage children to be their own inventors. We are not concerned with the product, but with enabling a process that provides learning, skill development and fosters the child's creativity. The child's art experience is not just to produce a product to bring home, but rather, to explore materials through open-ended opportunities. Children are given the opportunity to explore and respond to their own art as well as the creations of others. We strive to let each child know that they need only to please themselves with what they have created and that they are the sole owners of their creations.

## **Cooking**

Cooking helps children develop small motor control and explore math and science concepts involving their five senses, texture, liquid/solid states, and pre- and post-cooking characteristics. Cooking activities are provided regularly to experience new techniques such as scraping, mashing, peeling, cutting, pouring, mixing, and measuring. Through cooking experiences, children can take pride in being able to do something basic for themselves and each other that is usually done for them. They may prepare something to eat that is beloved and special, or try new things. Often children are more willing to attempt eating something new if they have participated in its preparation, thus expanding their food experiences. They can learn about food from different cultures or participate in preparing food for a special event. Foods hotter than 110 degrees are kept out of reach of children and are cooled before serving to our students.

## **Music and Movement**

Through singing, dancing, finger-plays, use of simple instruments, moving their bodies in planned and spontaneous ways, and listening to music, children have opportunities to develop many skills. They strengthen their muscles; learn to follow directions and take turns; and develop rhythm and balance while becoming more aware of their own and other's bodies. Literacy skills are strengthened as they learn new stories and phrases as well as experiment with letter and rhyming sounds. Music also allows children to develop their singing voices, sharpen auditory functioning and gain an appreciation for a variety of music across many cultures.

Many songs are learned over the course of the year and many quickly become favorites that children actively engage in and share at home. Music is incorporated daily in the classroom as part of the curriculum during whole group activities, clean up, rest time, and during transition times such as waiting to wash hands or use the bathroom. We also plan special occasion whole school sing-a-longs. This allows the younger children to learn from watching and participating with the older children while building a bond among our whole school community. It also provides small groups and individuals a chance to perform in front of their peers!

## **Science**

Science is integrated into the curriculum with many activities that involve both physical and natural science. Children explore physical science with many activities, especially through water and sand play, unit blocks, color mixing, woodworking, cooking, and outdoor play. During these activities, children experiment with many physical science concepts on a concrete level, such as solids, liquids, sinking, floating, wet and dry, pressure, motion, speed, weight, gravity, and cause and effect. Children have opportunities to use shovels, funnels, blocks, nesting measures, ramps, straws, magnifying glasses, outdoor swings, flash lights, pulleys, eyedroppers, bubble blowers, wheels, gears, and scales which extend their capacity to understand and construct their own physical realities.

The natural sciences play an active part in both the outdoor and indoor curriculum. Children have many opportunities to observe and experience the natural world. Activities are frequently inspired by the seasons and the weather as children collect leaves; plant bulbs, flowers and vegetables; care for our class pets; measure snow and watch it melt; and observe our famous horse chestnut tree as it changes through the seasons.

## **Mathematics**

Teachers intentionally plan and integrate varied opportunities and experiences for children to explore mathematical concepts in meaningful and concrete ways. Through counting songs, stories, rhymes and games, children work with numbers, number identification, and cardinality. We do not introduce formal written symbolic math to three and four year olds. We write numbers on the calendar and keep track of the days and months. Children get practice counting as they help set the table for snack, set out mats, etc. Teachers implement learning opportunities for children to explore mathematical concepts of one-to-one correspondence, size, shape, pattern, dimension, and measurement utilizing a variety of manipulative materials such as blocks, colored cubes, pegs, and unifix cubes.

## **Health and Safety**

Children are provided a variety of opportunities and materials that encourage good health practices. At snack and lunch, children are guided in proper hand washing and are encouraged to serve and feed themselves while teachers support good table manners and independence in cleaning up after meals. Children learn about nutrition through identifying and recognizing sources of food, preparing, eating, and valuing healthy foods. Additional activities and resources, such as planting our school garden, a trip to an apple orchard or farm, a visit from a dental hygienist or a pediatrician provide opportunities to share good health practices with children such as healthy eating, exercising and tooth brushing as well as chances for children to discuss, ask questions and express fears about visiting the doctor or dentist, getting shots and taking medicine.

Children are provided opportunities that increase their awareness of safety rules in the classroom, at home and in our community. Children are active participants in developing classroom rules and through materials such as books, play signs and dramatic play scenarios are provided regular opportunities to practice safety rules, both indoors and out. Each month, children participate in practice fire drills and an annual visit from the local fire department teaches children fire safety and a chance to practice fire safety procedures.

## Social Studies

Social studies concepts are integrated throughout rich, thematic units, providing opportunities for children as they develop a sense of identity, an understanding of their place in the world and an awareness of those around them. Teachers foster children to develop a sense of identity through self-exploration as they discuss and identify their physical characteristics and their abilities along with those of their peers and family members. Children have opportunities to appreciate similarities and differences as they draw and share self-portraits, family portraits, graph eye and hair color, and read about themselves and their classmates in specially created classroom books about friends and families. Through measuring and recording children's height, in the fall and then again in the spring, allows them to see how they grow and change over time.

Teachers encourage respect for others by inviting families into the classroom to share interested jobs and hobbies as well as family and cultural customs, holiday celebrations, food, clothing and other cultural experiences with the class. Additional opportunities to learn about various cultures are provided by singing songs and reading stories from various viewpoints and cultures, displaying pictures that reflect families in the community, and modeling an appreciation for all cultures and backgrounds.

Children develop a sense of belonging and of classroom community and responsibility through discussions of why we have rules at school, by helping to develop the rules of the classroom and by partaking in daily job responsibilities. A sense of school community is experienced at whole school events such as our sing-a-longs and November "Sharing Tables" as the younger children learn from watching and participating with the older children while building a bond among our whole school community.

A larger sense of community is presented by touring the preschool building and grounds, taking neighborhood walks and identifying structures (houses, businesses, churches, etc.), inviting community workers to be guest speakers in the classroom, along with trips to the Library and Apple Orchard. Children create representations of their homes and then teachers map the location of each child's house on a town map and are encouraged to create structures with blocks that represent what they know of their community and neighborhood. They might construct a home, fire station, gas station, harbor, airport, etc. as they begin to develop a sense of awareness of the larger environment of which they are a part. Classroom discussions are initiated by children's vacations and places to which they travel. Trucks, cars, buses, trains, airplanes and helicopters are added to the block area, and boats and barges are added to the water table helping children to explore the concepts of transportation.

Through dramatic play, children explore social roles in the family and jobs in the workplace as they cook dinner in the housekeeping area, take care of babies in the nursery, deliver mail to the post office, put fires out as a firefighter, buy and sell groceries at the store, or work as a veterinarian to take care of animals. Children are made aware of their effect on the environment and civic responsibilities as they recycle containers from lunch, bring in food items for a local food drive, raise money for sick children, and plant and care for flowers, herbs, and vegetables in our school gardens.

## Technology

Teachers provide opportunities to explore technology through the introduction of simple machines such as levers, gears, wheels, pulleys, ramps and inclines. Curriculum is enhanced with use of tape recorders and head phones. iPads and digital cameras are used to capture photos of block buildings, artwork that children have created or to videotape dramatic play to replay for children. Children's activities and accomplishments are organized into slideshows and displayed on a laptop for children to enjoy. Opportunities are provided for children to begin to explore and feel comfortable using an while accessing teacher selected curriculum enhancing programs. Teachers also utilize the internet to extend learning in the classroom by researching answers to questions and sharing the information with children.

## Large Motor Sequences/Climber Boxes

Our Blue, Orange and Red Pre-K Rooms are equipped with wooden climber boxes of varying sizes. These climbing structures are an integral part of our program adapted from the Early Intervention Program at Darcey School. The boxes are arranged to form climbing sequences by incorporating stairs, slides, and ramps to provide a variety of gross motor activities. These sequences give children experience with direction while providing opportunities for developing and strengthening their large muscles on a whole-body level. The sequences are developed with a place to begin, challenges about how to proceed, and allow children to achieve satisfaction in completing the process. Children have an opportunity to climb on this equipment as a place to focus their physical energy in the classroom and to test and strengthen their muscles in appropriate ways. Climbing sequences provide opportunities to develop and improve skills in depth perception, balance, turn taking, focus, spatial awareness and body control.

## Outdoor Play

Our extensive outdoor playground with gardens offers opportunities for growth and learning out-of-doors while developing an awareness of the natural world. We provide space, time and equipment for active, noisy outdoor play in **all** seasons except during pouring rain, temperatures below 10°F or during severe, dangerous weather conditions. Outdoor play is not merely a time to expend energy, but rather a time when growing and learning take place out of doors. It is a time for large motor development and freedom of movement in open space, as well as a time for using loud and exuberant voices. Children enjoy using tricycles, water, sand and mud, climbing, running, digging for worms, swinging, and participating in simple outside games. It is also a time for developing an awareness of the natural world: sky, trees, dirt, plants, puddles, worms, bugs, ice, snow, wind, and for breathing fresh outside air. We go out for an extended time every day as outside playtime is an important and integral part of our program.

## Holidays/Seasons

In relation to holidays as part of the curriculum, we feel that school should remain the safe, secure place that we strive for from the beginning **without** the invasion of a lot of holiday activities. We try to slowly let some of the symbols and activities of major holidays into classrooms to give children the opportunity to incorporate their experiences and perceptions into their play, but we try to keep school a sort of refuge from all the hectic energy and excitement around holiday time. We provide children with opportunities to share their family holiday traditions and we welcome parents to come in to share their cultural traditions as well. We put



much more focus on seasonal changes as a way of including and responding to diverse traditions, and therefore, spend much time investigating seasonal changes as a basis for curricular activities.

We do not have big parties or celebrations to recognize major holidays, and we do not incorporate religious traditions as part of our curriculum.

## **Enrichment and Family Activities**

### **Whole School Sings**

In October, November, and December, our classrooms acknowledge these special times of the year with a "Whole School Sing." Each classroom shares with the group special songs and finger plays they have learned and practiced which are significant to that time of year. Children enjoy sharing with others and develop a sense of school community beyond their classroom.

### **Sharing Tables**

In November, we talk about what being thankful means and what we are thankful for. Together, in a group setting, our parent helpers, teachers and children each share what they are thankful for. Each child contributes either a fruit, vegetable bread or muffin to share at the gathering. Large sharing tables are set up in our large classroom and everyone has lunch while getting a chance to sample the foods brought in by the children.

### **Movement Week**

March can sometimes seem like a long month, especially after many cold weather days that may keep children indoors. To add some interest to our curriculum, we provide a week of movement for the children. Each classroom sets up unique, theme-based activities which integrate creative arts, math and science with fine and gross motor activities. Children enjoy having the freedom to explore the classrooms and participate in the variety of activities offered in each room. After being in school for several months, children feel comfortable being able to move beyond their classrooms and interact with other teachers and peers from other classrooms.

### **Field Days**

In June, when the weather invites us to spend more time outdoors, we plan our outdoor Field Days which allow children to spend the entire morning outside. Teachers plan special outdoor gross motor activities such as parachute play, water relays, fly-swatter painting, to name a few! Small groups of children get to travel from activity to activity over the course of the morning enjoying the extended outdoor play while getting lots of exercise. We enjoy a whole group picnic snack on the lawn and finish off the morning with outdoor playground time.

### **Enrichment Programs**

At least twice a year, we enhance our curriculum by bringing in outside enrichment programs. These programs offer extensions to the learning in the classroom in the areas of literacy, music, science, social studies, and gross motor development.

### **Goodbye Book/End-of-Year Goodbye Picnic**

At the end of the school year, we invite families to our Goodbye Picnic. This family gathering is a meaningful way to say good-bye to the friends, families and teachers in our preschool community. This provides a concrete experience for the children through which to begin to recognize the changes and endings that are occurring as the school year ends. The evening consists of skits and songs performed by the children and teachers handing out Goodbye Books followed by a family picnic dinner on the lawn. A Goodbye Book is created for each child which includes work samples and photographs depicting a sequential record of each child's growth and development over the past school year.