

Whispering Pine Preschool: Curriculum

Our preschool curriculum framework builds on the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core (NYSPFCC) which describes the knowledge and skills that preschool children typically demonstrate with appropriate support. The New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core is organized into five broad developmental and interrelated domains.

- **Approaches to Learning** – How children become involved in learning and acquiring knowledge.
- **Physical Development and Health** – Children’s physical health and ability to engage in daily activities.
- **Social and Emotional Development** – The emotional competence and ability to form positive relationships that give meaning to children’s experiences in the home, school, and larger community.
- **Communication, Language, and Literacy** – How children understand, create, and communicate meaning.
- **Cognition and Knowledge of the World** – What children need to know and understand about their world and how they apply what they know. This domain is a direct reflection of the content competencies and knowledge of the Common Core Learning Standards.

Many strategies used in day to day activities overlap across domains reflecting the integrated nature of young children’s learning. For example, the general strategy of providing opportunities in the daily schedule for adult–child and child–child interactions foster social-emotional learning as well as learning in all other domains. Teachable Moments address the balance between planning for children’s learning and being spontaneous and responsive when a child or a small group of children may be absorbed with solving a problem or excited about a new idea or may show emerging understanding of a concept.

Planning creates the context for teachable moments. Intentional teaching includes planning interactions, activities, environments, and adaptations. Teachers plan such learning opportunities based on their observations and assessments of children and what they learn from the children’s families. When teachers plan learning opportunities, they have in mind how the children might respond. But the plan needs to be flexible to allow the teacher to be responsive to how the children engage in learning.

The environment: Interest (center) areas to support children’s play, exploration and child-initiated learning

Our preschool curriculum includes ways in which the indoor and outdoor physical environments to support children’s play and learning. When the physical environment is planned with children’s self-initiated learning in mind, children encounter places where they can freely explore what things are like and how things work. In such an environment, children investigate, invent, and experiment. To support children’s self-initiated play and integrated learning, we strive to create environments with a network

of interest (center) areas. Each area has a distinct focus and a predictable inventory of materials. The interest areas are used to extend children's active search for knowledge and are designed to offer materials with which children can apply emerging skills and develop concepts while they explore and play.

As teachers plan, they consider ways to augment or add to the basic inventory of materials in an area. Such curriculum plans extend or add complexity to the children's exploration and play. For children with special needs, adaptations are made to provide greater access. For all children to take full advantage of interest areas they need blocks of time for self-initiated play and exploration. Interest areas in a preschool environment include:

- Dramatic play area
- Block/construction area
- Art area
- Book/Writing area
- Math/Science area
- Family/All about me display area

The Daily Schedule

Our program has a variety of activities indoors and outdoors in small groups and large groups, supervised by teachers.

Child-initiated play

Children have ample time during the preschool day to initiate learning through play. When free to make their own choices, children gravitate to different areas of the indoor and outdoor environments and explore materials and ideas playfully and creatively. They may cluster in **small groups** to play together in different classroom areas like the block area or in the dramatic play area. Teachers use this time to guide, observe and note ways to build on children's ideas and further engage the children in learning.

Teacher-guided activities

Our curriculum also includes planning activities that teachers, rather than children, initiate and guide. Some teacher-guided activities are best done in small groups of four to eight children, in quiet spaces away from distractions of the entire group; others take place in a large group and include all children in the class. Intentional teachers use their knowledge, judgment, and expertise to organize learning experiences for children so when an unplanned situation arises they take advantage of a teaching opportunity.

Teacher-guided activities in small groups

Small groups provide a manageable context for children to discuss and explore ideas and experiences. The teacher acts as a guide, listener, and "problem-poser." In small groups away from the distractions of a large group, teachers can easily observe, listen, and converse with children. Teachers can focus on how the children think, express ideas, and use their emerging skills.

Teachers' conversations with children can enrich learning in all domains, particularly the children's language learning and vocabulary development. In addition, in order to intentionally guide the development of certain skills, teachers can plan small-group activities (e.g., songs, games, shared reading) that playfully engage children for short periods of time. Small groups offer excellent times for monitoring a child's developmental progress, for meeting his or her needs, and for providing scaffolds that help a child engage in new and more complex thinking. The chance for teachers to observe, listen, and document children's developmental progress is an important advantage that small groups have over large groups.

Teacher-guided activities in large groups

Large groups are used for singing, playing games, engaging in discussions, sharing stories, building a sense of community, and organizing the whole group's schedule and activities. When children gather as a whole class, they can share experiences with one another and engage in large-group activities such as singing and acting out a song or listening to a story. Storytelling allows teachers, as well as storytellers from the community, to connect with children's knowledge and experiences in meaningful ways.

Teachers can also use large-group time to share what new experiences will be available in the interest areas or what will happen in small groups. Large-group gatherings at the end of class time provide opportunities to review noteworthy happenings that day and to anticipate what will be available the next day.

Daily routines and transitions as curriculum

Our curriculum includes ideas for involving children in daily routines and making routines an important context for learning, in general, and for social-emotional development, in particular. Daily routines provide natural opportunities for children to apply emerging skills, take on responsibilities, and cooperate. Teachers integrate engaging learning opportunities into the everyday routines of arrivals, departures, mealtimes, naptimes, hand washing, setup, and clean-up, both indoors and outdoors. Children enthusiastically apply emerging skills to daily routines when they are helpers who ring the bell for coming inside; when they count how many are ready for lunch; when they move a card with their photo and name from the "home" column to the "preschool" column of a chart near the room entry; or when they help set the table for a snack or a special activity. Such routines offer opportunities for children to build language skills, to learn the rituals of sharing time with others, and to relate one action in a sequence to another.

Teacher Role: Observe, reflect, record

Observation means being present with children and attentive as they play and interact with others and the environment. This mindful kind of presence is different from participating in children's play or directing their play. Whether for one minute or five, an attentive, mindful presence means waiting to see what unfolds in order to gain a complete picture of children's play.

Teacher Role: Reflect, discuss, plan

As teachers reflect on children's play and interactions, they design curriculum to sustain, extend, and help children's play and interactions to be more complex and, consequently, support the children's continuing learning. Teachers review ideas for possible next steps in the curriculum.

Teacher Role: Implement

Teachers record notes, take a photo, or label, date, and keep a work sample, all of which they can later review to assess the impact of the curriculum plans. The evidence collected helps teachers to come up with ideas for supporting and assessing the children's learning. To do this teacher ask following questions:

- Are children responding as predicted, or were there surprises?
- What do the children's responses tell us? What concepts and ideas are the children forming within their play and interactions?
- How might children who are English learners and children who speak English collaborate in small groups to learn from one another?
- Are curricular adaptations/modifications/differentiation working for children with special needs
- Are children showing evidence of progress and how am I tracking this progress

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

Morning Routine – Children are encouraged and expected to complete morning routine skills including removing and hanging coat and back pack and placing folder and lunchbox in designated areas. Teachers provide various levels of support to encourage independence and helping others.

Discovery Time: When children arrive and put their belongings away, they can choose a book to look through. The children can look at the story themselves, share with a friend or ask a teacher to read it to them. Discovery time encourages independence as well as exposing children to stories. Many of our books from local libraries or our own collection are geared towards exploration of the theme covered in the classroom. Toys and props to enhance this period of the day are selected by the teachers.

Circle (Large Group-Teacher Guided): Circle-time is the time when all of the children within the classroom are together. During circle time, the children are working on staying engaged in an activity including name identification, interaction with peers, counting, calendar skills, observation, following directions, building classroom community, helping with certain tasks and communication. The teacher sets context for the day, guides discussions and presents activities. Whispering Pines believes that by incorporating speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and social workers into these large group activities, all children benefit.

Small Groups: Small groups provide the opportunity for teachers and/or therapists to work with smaller groups of children with similar abilities and needs. Small groups include speech-language therapy, occupational/physical therapy and special education, play and early childhood education. These groups provide more individualization and exploration related to the theme. Small group activities in the classroom benefit children in a variety of way. Since

preschoolers are still in the process of developing their cognitive and social skills, they often function best when in small group settings. These activities are a great opportunity for all children involved to further develop their social skills through structured interaction, using language to express their thoughts and needs with peers to accomplish a task. Cooperation is also promoted by working with just a few of peers towards a common goal and discover how to share and be fair and learn to compromise. Small groups encourage friendships between children who do not normally play together which helps create a more inclusive atmosphere within the classroom. This is a time the teacher can use to watch children more closely and observe their behavior. Visiting activity stations and focusing on just a few children at a time, observation and note taking is made easier. Small groups can also be set up based on the interests and abilities of children or to pair children who are highly advanced in a particular developmental area with those who may benefit from this exposure.

Snack/Meal Time - During snack/meal times, children sit at the table as a class and participate in requesting while eating their foods. Classroom staff encourages children to request food through a variety of means including verbally, gesturally, visually, and by sign language. Expectations for communication vary depending on the level of communication of each child and may include Reciprocal conversations between adult/child as well as child/child in guided topics that are of interest to and relevant to children and conversations that facilitate literacy development by encouraging new vocabulary (discussions about customs, foods and family traditions; distinguishing left from right; applying one-to one correspondence; using positions words; shapes, size and texture). Independence in using utensils and drinking from cups is also worked on at these times. Daily mealtime instructional planning includes working on handwashing; healthy eating habits; setting a table, pouring liquids mealtime manners: please, thank you, you're welcome, excuse me; utensil usage; sitting at a table to eat; and enjoying mealtime routines.

Movement/Sensory Activities: Within each day children participate in movement activities, which foster motor development. Activities are designed to provide the opportunity for children to hop, jump, balance, plan movement, as well as experience sensory input. The outdoor playground and indoor sensory room times create safe places for the children to explore gross motor equipment while developing their gross motor skills, language, and self-regulation. Children are provided support when needed to participate in activities including climbing, pushing, pulling, throwing, and sitting on a swing. Outdoor activities provide the children with opportunities to organize sensory/motor input, as well as develop balance and equilibrium. The uneven terrain also provides an ideal and natural setting for such development when weather permits outdoor activities. Children are outdoors each day, weather permitting. Appropriate cold weather clothing at school as therefore essential. Staff encourages children to select specific motor tasks and teaches and assists child to complete different actions. Staff also organize more structured activities and games working on a variety of gross motor skills including, throwing, kicking, jumping, running, crawling, and bike riding through different motor activities including ball play, jumping activities, obstacle courses, biking, and parachute play. Teachers increase the level of skill required by the children as the year goes on. As the children develop skills the teachers reduce their support and increase the expectations. As children are working on these motor skills they are also practicing, sharing, turn-taking, and associative or cooperative play skills. Teachers are using these activities to work toward functional play such as sports or team games. Children can carry over these skills during playground, sensory room, or in their community.

Transitions and Sensory Break: Sensory breaks are scheduled into the daily routine as a way to provide children body in space awareness and the opportunity to re-center their bodies. Heavy work, such as pushing and throwing a weighted ball, bouncing or rolling on a peanut, and upper body work, provide the children with proprioceptive input. Activities in which the children use their hands, including sensory tables and the ball pit, provide children with tactile input. Vestibular input is provided to children through the use of the swings. Most sensory break activities require the children to use both sides of their body together to perform a task, helping to improve bilateral coordination. Providing the children with schedule times throughout the day to re-center their bodies is beneficial to children who become overstimulated easily. The classroom teacher works closely with the occupational therapists in creating sensory diets for the children within the classroom. While sensory breaks are scheduled into the daily routine, the classroom teacher will also provide sensory breaks prior to difficult transitions or when the classroom as a whole has become over stimulated and needs a break. Sensory breaks are also created specifically for individual children as part of their program.

Centers/Play: Centers are a time where children are exposed to age appropriate curriculum, meeting New York State and Common Core standards related to Literacy, Math, Science, and Art. During center time the children rotate through 6 centers including, Math, Literacy, Science/Sensory, Handwriting, Art, and Dramatic Play. Children are able to make center choices during this time. Children experience fine and gross motor activities (such as coloring, drawing, manipulative toys or riding toys) dramatic play, tactile and sensory input and socialization. Centers are a time when skills are reinforced and when exploration and discovery is emphasized. Children use their speech and language skills to resolve social issues as well as practice counting, writing and fine motor skills. It is also a time when teachers can monitor behavioral issues and provide for further growth by designing play situations, which focus upon specific needs in all the development areas.

The Literacy, math and science/sensory centers follow the teaching guidelines provided in the curriculum manuals. The teachers modify and differentiate the lessons to meet the needs of each individual student.

During the art center, children are exposed to a variety of techniques for art expression. The children are working on fine motor skills, following directions, artistic expression, and attention to tasks during this center. Teachers work on increasing participation in the process of creating art rather than the end product. Children receive varying levels of prompting to increase participation in the activity, maximum levels of independence are highly encouraged.

The dramatic play center is a play center. During this center teachers are modeling appropriate play skills such as turn taking, pretend play, and functional toy use. The children are encouraged to interact with their peers through play. Teachers are providing a variety of theme related activities to engage the children in novel modes of play.

Music- Music is a regularly scheduled activity and occurs daily. During this time, children engage in several different music related activities, providing opportunities for exposure. Music activities may include Music Together, Me Moves, Musical Instruments, Dr. Jean Books, Yoga, and interactive music boards. **Me Moves** is a combination of music, movements, and images that provides attention, focus, and mood. The simple movements provided in Me Moves challenges the brain and promotes physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. **Musical instruments**, including, shakers, maracas, drums, bells, triangles, and rhythm sticks, are provided to the children and paired with music. The children follow the directions of each song

and learn to use the musical instruments in a functional way. **Dr. Jean's Sing Along and Read Along Series** includes twelve popular songs that include a variety of early childhood themes and whimsical stories to support early learning concepts and language development. The books are accompanied by songs to make learning fun. **Yoga** physically enhances the child's flexibility, strength, coordination, and body awareness. It also improves their coordination and sense of calmness and relaxation. **Interactive music boards** provide children with exposure to every day songs while using the SmartBoard or iPad. Children each take turns selecting a song and either listening to or watching it on the interactive boards. This type of music provides children with exposure to technology and the opportunity to select their own choices during music time. The songs provided for selection are changed regularly and include theme or holiday related choices. Because all children learn differently, exposing children and providing them with the opportunity to participate in music in a variety of outlets, allows the children to participate in their own way. Once a week the children participate in the Music Together program.

Storytime: Storytime is a time where teachers engage children in read-aloud stories. Books and stories expose children to literacy skills. Teachers use a variety of techniques to engage children. Teachers incorporate theme related books as well as teacher created and interactive stories with felt boards, icons, and props to encourage child involvement in the story. Teachers read in an engaging tone and/or use technology to encourage child attention. During this time teachers are working on early-literacy skills including attention, listening, comprehension, print awareness.

Closing Circle (Teacher Guided large group): Closing circle is another large group time when the events of the day are discussed. This end of the day activity provides children with closure for the day and information to anticipate and predict what will be happening on subsequent days.

CURRICULUM Materials and Guides

Learning Without Tears Curriculum Materials

Language & Literacy Pre-K

In 2016 we added these materials as an additional resource for teachers to use in classrooms. The unique lessons are memorable and provide real-life context, so children can easily master new concepts. Skills are taught explicitly and sequenced from the easiest to the most challenging to provide opportunities for differentiated instruction.

Numbers & Math Pre-K

Take the mystery out of math as children make connections to their everyday world. More than 60 unique lessons that will make your students eager to learn math! 197 pages.

- Lessons for geometry, counting, math vocabulary, measurement, time, and problem solving
- Step-by-step instructions to reduce teacher prep time
- Integrated assessments to check learning after each lesson
- Teaching tips extend learning by adding variety or complexity

Readiness & Writing Pre-K (this part of this program has been in use since 2005)

- This program offers basic exercises in figure-ground discrimination and top-to-bottom, left-to-right sequencing. When it comes to forming letters it begins with all capitals because unlike the lower-case the capital letters are all very easy to distinguish. Lessons

address general readiness, alphabet knowledge, letter/number recognition and formation, counting, drawing, shapes, and colors.

ScienceStart! Early Childhood Curriculum

We are using these materials in 2018-2019 as an additional resource for teachers to use in their classrooms to strengthen this curricular strand. We will evaluate this program at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. ScienceStart! offers research-based early childhood Curriculum, Lesson Plans and Activities that use children's curiosity to support learning Language, Literacy, Mathematics, and Science. The early childhood curriculum addresses all domains of science, presented at a level appropriate for young children's interest in exploring and learning about their everyday world. The curriculum is coherent so that each day's lesson builds on and reinforces the previous lesson and provides the foundation for the next lesson. The curriculum is integrated, in that the science content is explicitly related to activities in math, in language development, in literacy development, and during art activities, outdoor play and center-based play.

- Engages children in active exploration of the major topics of science in a developmentally appropriate way
- Is designed in accordance with the most up-to-date research on young children's learning and development
- Meets Common Core Standards as well as standards published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, The National Council of Teachers of English, and most US States
- Has been shown by research to be effective in promoting children's development of
 - A rich knowledge base about the everyday world
 - Scientific reasoning skills
 - Vocabulary and conversational skills
 - Early literacy skills

The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool (CC)

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum that features exploration and discovery as a way of learning. Comprising of The Foundation, six knowledge-building volumes that help teachers set up a high-quality learning environment and build a thorough understanding of best practices, so they're ready to support every child, every day, and the Daily Resources, which offer step-by-step guidance in the form of Teaching Guides and additional daily teaching tools that help teachers plan and manage their days so they're always supporting children's learning and development and promoting positive outcomes. The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool is fully aligned with Early Learning Framework and state early learning standards. Using exploration and discovery as a way of learning, The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool enables children to develop confidence, creativity, and lifelong critical thinking skills.

Participation in Quality Initiatives and Outcomes

Participant in Pyramid Model Implementation-Cohort 1: We are an implementation site (in year 3) for the Pyramid Model aligns with our philosophy, mission and curriculum and meets program goals to strengthen supports to teachers, children and families. Our ongoing participation allows us to add more classrooms (for *TPOT*) and additional coaches so that all of

our Amsterdam classrooms can participate. The Pyramid Model strategies are based on evidence-based best practices in early childhood. The Pyramid Model is also focused on building positive relationships, developing supportive and nurturing environments, teaching social skills, empathy and emotional vocabulary, and providing individualized supports when needed. We are in the second year of our implementation process. Most of our staff have completed all three Pyramid modules and we are using the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (**T POT**) and coaching in several of our classrooms with additional classrooms scheduled for implementation in 2018-2019. The T POT was developed to measure the fidelity with which teachers implement *Pyramid Model* practices and provides information that can be used to:

- Describe “quality” of implementation of T POT practices
- Compare implementation within and across teachers/classrooms
- Support program-wide implementation and improvement activities
- Identify needs of teachers for training and implementation support

(WPP goal #3)

Creation of Outdoor and Indoor Play Spaces

Play is an important component of our preschool program and creating dedicated spaces for this has been an important addition to our program. Our program offers several options to children for indoor play, but these are not a substitute for being outdoors. In 2015 we worked with Bears Playground to create an outdoor play space built to current specification for preschool children. We expanded the fenced playground area last year and expect to have an additional expansion approved so we can offer additional outdoor play opportunities for preschool children.

Music Together

This program has been offered to children and families on our Amsterdam site since 2015-2016. Music Together is a pioneer in music education in schools and childcare settings serving children from birth through and including kindergarten. This research-based, comprehensive curriculum includes award-winning music and developmentally appropriate activities that can be easily integrated into any early learning setting, including pre-kindergarten programs. The unique Music Together curriculum components raise the overall quality of children's early learning in the following ways:

- Helps children develop music competence, which opens the door to a lifetime of music participation
- Supports children's development in key early learning domains
- Gives teachers tools to enhance classroom life and reach curricular goal
- Aligns with many early learning standards, curricula (including Creative Curriculum), and philosophies
- Supports family engagement and parent-child relationships

SOUNDS IN MOTION (SIM) Program

The SIM program has been implemented in our four-year-old classrooms in 2018-2019. Data is being collected to assess the effectiveness of this program for continued use. SIM is an intervention program designed to develop listening skills in children, which in turn helps to improve articulation, and vocabulary skills, auditory memory, phonemic awareness and early literacy. SIM is used primarily with pre-kindergarten through first grade students. It enables speech-language pathologists to work collaboratively with teachers in regular education and special education classrooms, in developing oral language and early reading and writing skills. It also acts as an early diagnostic tool, identifying children who may need further evaluation. The Sounds in Motion approach pairs kinesthetic gross motor movements with

phonemes to teach articulation, phonemic awareness and sound/symbol association. It addresses improvement of receptive and expressive (oral and written) language skills, and it helps children develop the ability to become actively involved in the task of listening – a communication activity that is generally overlooked in academic instruction. Listening provides the foundation for all aspects of language and cognitive development and plays a life-long role in the processes of learning and communication.