



# Curriculum Guide

## NPS Early Childhood Education and Extended Day Programs

The Early Childhood Education and Extended Day Programs curriculum is developed from the image of the child as competent and full of potential and is based on research and best practices. In 2000 a committee was formed to articulate our EC curriculum philosophy and approach. The committee studied current research and investigated many curriculum models. The group took into consideration the variety of programs that are offered through our department and was careful to make the curriculum applicable to all of the programs.

The committee was inspired by the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, a region in northern Italy. In 1980 Newsweek identified their preschool programs as the best in the world and in turn the schools received much attention and interest. The Reggio Approach begins with a genuine and deep respect for children, their families and their culture. This philosophy has begun to impact Early Childhood programs in our country as there are many advantages to the Reggio Approach. For children, this approach:

- Is based on children's abilities and skills.
- Models learning by doing.
- Allows children the opportunity to work in a group and respects each person's point of view while provoking thought and supporting socialization and collaboration.
- Bases learning, both formal and play-based, on children's true interests.
- Nurtures and encourages curiosity in children.
- Supports learning through observation and listening.
- Records the learning process through documentation.
- Exposes children to many materials (clay, wire, paper, paint, shadows, etc.) that offer children tools with which to express themselves.
- Teaches children to become better communicators.
- Develops children's mastery by building competencies.
- Uses displays for children to see their abstract ideas become more concrete as they are encouraged to express themselves through use of materials.

Overall, the Reggio Approach:

- Uses a collaborative approach with staff, administration and families.
- Emphasizes listening to and observing children to extend learning.
- Uses the environment to provoke learning.
- Displays high-quality work by the children so visitors and parents are then able to learn more about the children's capabilities and potential. This work also promotes the program.
- Recognizes children as unique and valuable.

## Classroom Environment

### The Role of the Environment

Teachers are encouraged to step back and critically examine the classroom space to determine whether the environment is personally reflective of the children, parents, and teachers. Through thoughtful use of space, color, natural light, displays of children's work, and attention to detail, the environment serves as the third teacher. We refrain from using commercially produced materials such as borders, posters, alphabets, numbers, shapes, colors, etc. Instead, displays feature work in which children and teachers have selected the media or subject and always reflect the interest and learning taking place in the classroom. The environment invites engagement, wonder, imagination and learning. Our goal is to convey to children, parents, teachers and community how the space is to be used and that their presence is valued and respected. The environment sets the stage for interactions among children.

Our classroom environments are:

- Organized and free of clutter.
- Set up with well defined centers.
- Intentionally planned to provide free access of materials for children.
- Home-like, with lamps, plants, baskets, and soft elements.
- Filled with a wide variety of interesting, open-ended, natural materials (loose parts) for children to explore and move from area to area.
- Organized with documentation that accompanies children's work posted in common areas and hallways to provide a context for families, visitors and colleagues.
- Reflective of children's interest.

### Classroom Displays and Postings

Items displayed and posted in the classroom are relevant and current. Children's work is thoughtfully displayed with accompanying documentation. Pictures and posters reflect the diversity of the class as well as diversity in the world.

*Each classroom has a Parent Board or area which includes the following:*

- A copy of the License/Certificate of Accreditation/Licensing Book (Green)
- The Parent Handbook
- The program brochure
- A current menu
- Curriculum plans or Daily Reflection Sheets
- School Improvement Goals
- Statement regarding Criminal Background checks for staff and volunteers
- The flexible daily schedule
- Other communication from the office as needed

*Emergency Information is typically posted near the phone and includes the following:*

- Fire evacuation plans
- Map of evacuation route
- Inclement weather procedures
- Medical emergency procedures

## Learning Centers/Areas

Learning Centers are well-defined spaces in the classroom. Materials are carefully selected and designed to be flexible and open ended. Through keen observation and conversations with children throughout the school year, learning centers are adapted to reflect the children's interests and encourage their curiosity and sense of wonder. A variety of materials can be a provocation for deeper understanding.

### Writing Center

This center supports children's emerging interest in literacy. Licensing rules require that a minimum of 30 minutes of developmentally appropriate emergent literacy activities be provided each day. A variety of paper, writing tools, journals, envelopes, tape, post-it notes, etc. are always available and accessible. Simple sight words and phrases including pictures, names of children in the classroom with pictures are available, children create numbers and letters to display. A message center (for children to write and leave messages for each other) is available in this area and serves as an effective way we encourage writing.

### Art Center

A variety of media that promotes creative, open ended opportunities for children to experiment and express themselves are available to children. Materials are age appropriate, authentic and natural, and children's interests is embraced and expanded upon. We partner with children to create an organized and purposeful art area which invites interactions with the materials and expands children's thinking. We value the use of recycled materials as a way to support children's creative expression.

We stress the importance of the process as the focus of a child's work, not the product. We ask children to tell us about their work and record their words. Children are encouraged to write their own name on their work. Adults write on children's work only with their permission.

Adult made models are not utilized and art projects using food are discouraged.

### Dramatic Play

Engagement in this learning center supports children's investigations and deepens their understanding of their world. Items in this area include real materials like boxes and cans of food, dress up clothes, fabric and scarves and multicultural items. The materials selected are adaptable as children create different identities for the dramatic play area. School-age children are also investigating their world and experiment with "real world" experiences like restaurants, travel agencies, offices and photo shops. Materials for older children include items like menus and order pads, travel brochures, cash registers, cameras, phones, and computer boards.

## **Book/Quiet Area(s)**

This is a quiet, well-defined area where children can relax, read and research topics of interest. Books may be displayed on a shelving unit or in baskets and the area conveys the message that books are important. Furnishings include soft elements, lamps, plants, area rugs and baskets. A selection of age appropriate interesting books, as well as authentic research material, is available and rotated. Books may also be available in baskets in other areas of the classroom.

We value providing independent, quiet spaces within the classroom for children to read, reflect or simply take a breath.

## **Construction Area**

We provide a variety of age appropriate building materials like Lego's, wooden unit blocks and accessories, Kapla blocks and natural materials like stones, tiles, tubes, wood. Also provided are items like clipboards, pencils and post-it notes for design and books for reference.

## **Science, Math, Sensory**

Tactile opportunities like clay, Playdoh, shaving cream, water and sand are available on a daily basis. Children are provided with opportunities to count, sort, sequence, problem solve and categorize utilizing games, manipulative toys, puzzles, and natural materials such as stones and sea shells. Tools like mirrors, microscopes, magnifying glasses, measuring tools and binoculars should be accessible so children can further their investigation of the world. Cooking projects provide fun along with valuable learning opportunities.

## **Motor Development**

Opportunities are provided to use and develop both small and large muscles. Children naturally develop gross, fine, and visual motor skills early on in life, if they are exposed to a variety of experiences. Materials like beads, wire, buttons, clay, scissors, tongs, hole punches and string should be available to enhance fine motor skills. Opportunities for children to run, jump, skip, hop, roll and dance and move supports gross motor development.

### **Fine Motor:**

Fine Motor development activities are offered daily. In addition, fine motor bags are utilized in Pre-K programs as a way to bridge the home to school connection.

### **Large Motor:**

Both independent and group activities that help develop children's large muscles are supported and encouraged. Time is provided for active play such as running, jumping, marching, climbing and balancing. Music is incorporated with many large motor/movement activities. Pre-K programs include a variety of music and movement activities daily. These activities may be included in group time, during transitions, in small groups or center times. The "Preschool Motor Moms and Dads Program" is provided weekly from the beginning of October through the end of May. Additional games, activities and obstacle courses that support large motor development are introduced throughout the year.

## The Daily Schedule

### Gathering Time

Group/gathering times are typically facilitated by the Head Teacher or Lead Assistant. During this time, all children are encouraged to join in and participate in group discussions and other group activities. Staff acknowledge and accept that children's methods of participation may vary. Children are never pressured to share or verbalize their thoughts. Nor are they expected to sit a certain way or for long periods of time.

Group Gathering time is an opportunity for teachers to focus on planning and reflection with children. They may discuss what happened the previous day and plan for the current day together. Additional activities in Pre-K and Wondergarten programs can include opportunities for sharing, movement to music, games, finger plays, Brain Gym®, singing, and story telling.

In Kids' Club, the primary goal of group is to take attendance in order to account for all the children that are expected. For this reason, group is done as soon as possible after school dismisses so that any missing children can be located. Group discussions include community building activities, issues and problem solving, and making group decisions democratically.

### Story Time/Literacy Building Opportunities

Literacy may be linked with the gathering time or may be a separate time altogether. Activities may include reading, writing or dictating stories, poems, chapter books, story boards, using puppets, flannel boards and drama. Developmentally appropriate language and literacy experiences are offered at varied times throughout the day and for not less than a total of thirty minutes.

### Transitions

Children are approached individually or in small groups and told that clean up time is approaching. We have found that a signal such as the sound of a musical instrument (chimes, drum, etc.) or a song may be helpful when it is time to clean up. Transition activities are planned and purposeful.

### Clean Up

Ample time is provided for clean-up within the daily schedule. Staff support the development of children's self help skills, independence and responsibility. Staff work along side children to provide a positive role model. This also helps to develop a sense of community in the classroom by working together and showing respect for the environment.

Cleaning materials and tools like small brooms, dust pans, etc. are available for children to use.

## **Snack/Meals**

Snack/meal times provide the opportunity for social interaction and fostering independence. Children assist with set up and clean up and are encouraged to do as much for themselves as possible with adult guidance and support. Children assist with setting the table, opening their own milk, unwrapping and inserting their own straw, pouring milk, etc.

In Full-Day Pre-K, breakfast is served no later than 9:15 a.m.

In Full-Day Pre-K and Wondergarten programs, lunch can be purchased through Food Service or brought from home.

In Pre-K programs, snack time is a choice and offered during center time or may be offered at one time for all the children. In Kids' Club snack is typically served as a group in the cafeteria.

## **Small Group Opportunities**

A variety of methods are used for grouping children for small group work. Opportunities are provided for children to test theories, expand on ideas and collaborate and cooperate during play and project work. Space and time is provided for small groups of children to work collaboratively on projects of interest and activities are offered daily. Small groups are supported by an adult through journaling, photo opportunities, documentation and reflection. In Pre-K programs children are assigned a primary caregiver. The goal of this practice is to provide ongoing personal contact, meaningful learning activities, supervision, and immediate care as needed to protect children's well-being.

## **Studio/Curriculum Support**

The Studio is a space where children are encouraged to be creative and explore a variety of materials. Typically, small groups of 4 year-old preschool age children are invited on a weekly basis to join the Studio teacher to problem solve, experience different media, and build knowledge together. The concept of the Studio is also incorporated into the classroom environment.

The Studio teacher's role is to support and extend classroom experiences. Children benefit from a connection between the Studio and classroom supported by a collaborative relationship among the teachers. This collaboration includes active participation during group gatherings as well as reflection and planning together. This process empowers children to be actively involved in the learning community. Studio teachers are available to support all teachers with projects and curriculum.

## **Outdoor Time**

The outdoor environment is an extension of the classroom. It provides children the freedom to interact with each other and nature. Outdoor play is important and available daily, provided it is not raining, there is no tornado watch and the actual temperature is above twenty (20) degrees and wind chill is above ten (10) degrees (preschool age children). Kids' Club and Wondergarten programs follow the temperature guidelines in the elementary building.

The duration of outside play is determined by evaluating the conditions. Our staff make sure children are properly dressed and prepared to go outside.

To support outdoor play interesting and useful materials are provided to children including scarves, streamers, clipboards, balls, bikes/trikes, wagons, pails and shovels.

Teachers work with children to develop systems that allow children to assist with cleaning up outdoor equipment to reinforce respect for the environment.

## Rest Time

Children that are under school age and in our care for 5 or more continuous hours must be provided with an opportunity to rest. Staff assist in helping children transition to rest time. In Full-Day Pre-K classrooms rest time is no more than two hours in duration. Children are offered books at the beginning of rest time. Children not sleeping after about 45 minutes are offered an alternative activity such as slate boards with chalk, markers, etc. Children may engage in these materials on their cots/ rest mats, at tables in the classroom, or other areas of the building if appropriate supervision is available.

Wongertgarten children take a brief “rest and read” time each day which lasts no longer than 30 minutes.

## Media/Computers

Active media like cameras, video recorders, audio taping, and computers that children control may be used in the classroom to support children’s research and investigations.

Videos are shown very rarely and only when they fit into the planning and support a particular topic of study. In general, passive media like television, film, videotapes, and books on tape are very limited. Head Teachers preview all videos prior to showing them to children. Only those videos which have been purchased within the copyright regulations and are “G” rated and documented on planning sheets may be shown. Families are informed prior to a video being shown and another option for activity is available so no child is *required* to view the program.

School-age children may use computers as an activity choice. Our staff observe and monitor the children utilizing computers to assure technology guidelines are in place and websites being visited are appropriate. A reasonable time limit is required for individual computer use.

## Homework

In Kids’ Club programs children are provided with a time and indoor space to work on homework each afternoon. The “homework call” is supervised by a staff person who can offer assistance if needed. Kids’ Club staff partner with families to define and support the needs of individual children.

## Brain Gym®

This is an educational, movement based program which is designed to provide activities which help integrate the brain, senses and body so that optimal learning may occur.

Brain Gym® activities help in the following areas:

- memory, concentration and focus
- physical coordination and balance
- communication skills and language development
- academic skills

Teachers have found that incorporating some Brain Gym® activities into their daily schedules, usually during transition to group meeting, is beneficial and has been shown to be an effective behavior management strategy. Training is provided to staff so that the elements of Brain Gym® will be incorporated into each classroom to support children's learning.

## Additional Classroom Elements

### Newsletters

The classroom newsletter is a valuable tool for communicating and partnering with families. Some teachers opt to send them out on a weekly basis, some less frequently. At a minimum, newsletters go out monthly. The purpose of sending a newsletter home to families on a consistent basis is to keep parents informed and to share children's learning experiences.

The following information is typically included in all newsletters:

- Reflections of the experiences occurring in the classroom
- The link to learning and school readiness/enrichment
- Pertinent program information

In addition, newsletters may contain:

- Children's reflections
- Pertinent articles that relate to classroom experiences
- Other relevant information
- Pictures of the children

Newsletters may be emailed to families and put on the EC website. Pictures of the children's faces and children's names do not go on the web.

### Emergent Curriculum Plans

Teaching teams reflect on common elements being pursued by children and brainstorm future activities and explorations that support and expand on children's interests.

Planning and reflection sheets are used as a tool for documentation of experiences to be explored and theories to be investigated. Careful observation of children is an important element in the planning process. In addition, teaching teams will utilize:

- The children's Family Information Form
- The children's previous knowledge

- Their observations and notes/Journaling
- The Key Principles from Reggio Emilia

Teachers make the connections from the classroom activities to the learning outcomes and the developmental skills that are occurring. This is articulated both in conversations with parents and also in a more formal way via the classroom newsletter.

Teachers meet monthly in collegial teams and classroom teams to set goals and plan.

## **Holidays and Celebrations**

Our curriculum is not holiday driven. This means that impending holidays are not the basis of plans in the classroom or used as a starting point for decorating the environment. Celebrations are often connected with holidays. Teachers give careful consideration to plans for celebrations.

They are planned by the teacher, based on conversations with children and observations of children. Parents are a valuable resource, and all ideas are heard and negotiated.

The goal is to offer children consistency and experiences that allow them to be engaged in the process. Providing authentic learning opportunities focused on the seasons, what's happening in the community and what's relevant to children is important. Along with daily classroom activities, holiday celebrations are just one way for children, teachers and families to work together to create developmentally and culturally appropriate learning opportunities.

Celebrations will typically:

- Focus on meaningful activities and offer authentic learning experiences for children.
- Respect children's need for consistency and routine in their day.
- Respect diversity.
- Connect with the interests of children.
- Be relevant to children's daily life at school.
- Honor every group - children, families and staff.
- Be inclusive.
- Focus on celebrating traditions.
- Respect that family holiday celebrations are unique and different in each family.

Celebrations will not typically:

- Be centered around foods that are high in fat and sugar.
- Promote stereotypes or inaccurate history.
- Be a complete deviation from a typical day.
- Be scary or uncomfortable for some children.
- Be canned or "touristy".
- Over stimulate children.
- Exclude any children.
- Assume what the interests of children are.
- Encourage children to be consumers. (Focusing on buying things and supporting the competition between who has the most and the best.)

Some examples of past celebrations include:

- Listening to and writing children's stories and plans for their celebrations with their families. Then creating a book or documentation panel out of these individual stories.
- Creating a Celebration book.
- Inviting children to bring in a picture or artifact of a family celebration for discussion with the class.
- Providing a variety of new and recycled seasonal stationary in the writing center. For example, we may ask parents to donate Valentines for the writing center instead of having children fill them out at home and bring them in to pass out.
- Sensory activities - like gutting a pumpkin or filling the sand/water table with leaves or snow.
- Baking and cooking with children. Bread, rice and pasta/dumplings are common to all cultures and can support awareness of diversity.
- Making cards or wrapping paper which can be used for the variety of gifts and celebrations.
- Singing songs with fingerplays. Reading stories.
- Creating a holiday with the children. Planning activities and a "celebration" for the invented holiday.
- Asking families to donate a book on their child's birthday. Inviting parents in to read the book with the class and put the child's picture on the inside cover.

Some activities you won't see in our program include:

- Holiday stencil shapes.
- Paper and/or paint colors specific at holiday times (for example, only using orange and black paper at Halloween).
- Situations where children sit, wait and watch as an adult does the work.
- Plans without input from children.
- Holiday pre-cut shapes.

We ask ourselves....

Why is it important to teach this holiday?

Am I supporting the uniqueness and diversity of each family?

Are the activities meaningful?

Are the activities a good use of children's time?

Am I supporting best practice and developmentally appropriate practice?

Does the classroom environment and curriculum reflect the diversity in the world around us?

Do the plans respect family's economic diversity? Or do they create financial stress for families?

## Assessment

### Portfolios:

Information is gathered in the context of everyday classroom activities to obtain a representative picture of each child's abilities and progress. We track children's progress for a variety of reasons:

- to be assured that learning and development are taking place,
- to make children's progress visible to parents and
- to make adjustments in our teaching strategies.

Pre-K Teachers maintain a portfolio for each child. Portfolios are a collection of children's experiences, from the very beginning of the school year through the end, that converge the knowledge being built during the child's time spent at school. The purpose of the portfolio is to track children's growth and development throughout the school year. The key is to observe purposefully and document examples of rich data. The portfolio may include, but is not limited to:

- drawing samples
- writing samples
- evidence of cutting and other fine motor experiences
- photographs of large motor experiences
- documentation of children's use of language (a story or theory dictated to a teacher)

### **Individual Goals:**

Purposeful observation at the beginning of the school year leads teachers to understand each child's strengths and weaknesses. These observations along with discussions with parents will guide individual goals. Individual goals for children are established with families in the fall and guide the curriculum planning. Plans are adapted in response to the interests, strengths and needs expressed by the children. Portfolios are shared with families throughout the year, when requested, and during conferences. They are distributed at the end of the school year. Individual goals for children are written and reviewed regularly. As children develop, goals are amended.

### **Parent/Teacher Conferences:**

Conferences are offered twice a year for all Pre-K families. Conferences provide an opportunity for teachers and parents to come together to discuss children's progress, accomplishments and experiences at home and school. Teachers are available to schedule a time to conference with families both formally and informally as needed. As part of the conference experience, families are offered opportunities to observe in the classroom.

### **Classroom Observations:**

Teachers invite and encourage parents to visit the classroom for a more formal observation in the fall and spring. We provide a format for parents to communicate their feedback and ask questions. The fall observation provides parents with an opportunity for input on their child's individual goals.

The classroom observation provides parents with the opportunity to observe their child and the dynamics of the classroom "in action." Observations are scheduled and parents may observe from a distance or become actively involved.

### **Documentation:**

This is the process of gathering evidence of children's learning. Documentation is done through observation, photos, video tape, work samples, conversations and reflections. It is an ongoing process that involves the teachers in analyzing, discussing and interpreting their observations. The following key areas are related to documentation:

- Reflections: Sharing children's perspectives
- Assessment: Capturing competence
- Children's Work: Collecting samples
- Observation: Watching, listening and recording
- Narratives: Telling stories

We document to share the value of active learning experiences, to determine the effectiveness of teaching strategies and to support the diverse ways children learn. Documentation also involves families in their children's education, assesses children's progress and encourages teacher self-reflection and professional growth.

Children's work that is on display is accompanied by relevant documentation.

### **Project Work/Studies/Emergent Curriculum**

Projects and studies provide the foundation of the children's and teacher's daily learning experiences. They may be short or long term in duration depending on the interest level and time spent investigating. The value in project work is in recognizing the importance of children's investigations and knowledge that is built during the process.

Projects and studies may originate from:

- common experiences
- determining children's interests through listening and observing
- child-initiated topics, teacher-initiated topics

Projects are likely to be successful if they are:

- more concrete than abstract
- direct experiences with real objects
- easily related to prior experiences
- topics that enable children to do research with minimal adult assistance
- consistent with children's skills and techniques
- culturally relevant to children and their families

A "Study" Outline and Documentation Guide is available to support project work throughout the year.

### **Family Involvement**

Family members are welcome visitors in our programs at all times. We recognize that parents are their children's first and best teachers. Activities to allow families to network at the beginning of the school year are valued and encouraged (i.e. Open House, potlucks, picnics, ice cream socials). Equally important and often more valuable are opportunities that support children's work and learning in the classroom (i.e. exploration of materials, discussions of project work).

Each class provides opportunities throughout the year to bring families together. When planning these activities we take into consideration the needs and schedules of our busy families.

### **Field Trips**

#### **Full-Day Pre-K, Half-Day Pre-K and Parent/Child:**

In keeping with our emergent curriculum philosophy, field trips are aligned with the interest areas occurring in the classroom. They are planned with the involvement of families as the interests emerge during topics of study. Consideration is given to maintaining class times and schedules as well as the additional cost to families. There may be one or two "Traditional" preplanned trips. Transportation for all Pre-K field trips is provided by parents. Northville Public Schools will not provide buses. Parents are required to drive their own child and take all necessary safety precautions.

## **Kids' Club and Wondergarten:**

Field trips are arranged during extra care weeks and for the summer programs. Parent input is always welcome.

## **Behavior Guidance**

Our goal of guiding children's behavior is to help children learn self-discipline and self-control. The goal for staff is to encourage children to respect themselves, other people and the environment. We view mistakes that children make as opportunities for learning and use logical consequences.

When developing a classroom management plan, the following concepts are considered:

- Expectations are specific, taught and modeled.
- Specific, positive feedback is included in all plans.
- Consequences are logical and related to the behavior whenever possible to increase the probability of learning.
- We separate the "deed" from the "doer" in order to maintain self-esteem. Make sure the child understands it is what he/she is doing that you do not like, not that you do not like them.
- Communicate feelings using an "I" statement (i.e.; Suzy, I feel \_\_\_\_ when you throw things in class because it might hurt someone.) Avoid judgmental statements.

Procedure for Discipline Concerns:

1. Talk with the child.
2. Discuss the situation with classroom staff team.
3. Contact the parent.
4. Contact the Assistant Program Coordinator or the Program Coordinator.
5. Set up a formal conference.

## **Diversity**

Staff respect and build on the strengths of the diverse cultures represented in our program. Family participation and involvement is encouraged to help build a sense of community and belonging.

Careful consideration is given when selecting equipment and materials. We seek to provide baskets, fabrics, books, dolls, craft pieces, music and images that are representative of the various cultures in the classroom as well as the larger community.

The Family Information Form is reviewed and utilized to further staff understanding of each child and family.

## English Language Learners

We strive to provide a classroom setting that is based on a holistic, individual-focused approach and founded in developmentally appropriate practice.

While developing a new language acquisition, children need:

- routine
- quiet space to observe and work independently
- lots of repetition and reciting
- lots of nonverbal communication
- picture schedules

Teachers are encouraged to partner with parents, learn simple phrases and words in the child's language, and seek support as needed from our District ELL Department.

## Motor Skills Program

All Pre-K classrooms provide the Preschool Motor Program. The program begins in early October each year and runs through the end of May. Start-up training is provided to parents and staff at the beginning of the school year. Head Teachers attend all motor development training with parents, and assist in coordinating the parent volunteer schedule. Parent volunteers may not directly supervise children; this is the responsibility of staff employed by Early Childhood. Therefore staff monitor the Motor Program throughout the school year.

Fine Motor Bags are utilized in classrooms as well.

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