Early Childhood Center

Newman Elementary School
1155 Central Avenue
Needham, MA 02492
(781) 455-0416

Preschool Handbook
JUST PLAYING

When I am building in the block room,
Please don’t say, “I’m just playing.”
For, you see, I’m learning as I play
About balance and shapes.

When I’m getting all dressed up,
Setting the table, caring for the babies,
Don’t get the idea I’m “just playing”.
I may be a mother or a father someday.

When you see me up to my elbows in paint,
Or standing at an easel, or molding and shaping clay,
Please don’t let me hear you say, “He’s just playing”
For you see, I’m Learning as I play.
I’m expressing myself and being creative,
I may be an artist or an inventor someday.

When you see me sitting in a chair
“Reading to an imaginary audience,
Please don’t laugh and think I’m, “just playing”
For, you see, I’m learning as I play.
I may be a teacher someday.

When you see me combing the bushes for bugs,
Or packing my pockets with choice things I find,
Don’t pass it off as “just playing”.
For, you see, I’m learning as I play.
I may be a scientist someday.

When you see me engrossed in a puzzle,
Or “plaything” at my school,
Please don’t feel the time is wasted in “play”
For, you see, I’m learning as I play.
I’m learning to solve problems and concentrate.
I may be in business someday.

When you see me cooking or tasting foods,
Please don’t think that because I enjoy it, it is just “play”
For, you see, I’m learning as I play
I’m learning how my body works.
I may be a doctor, nurse, or athlete someday.

When you ask me what I’ve done at school today,
And I say “I played”
Please don’t misunderstand me
For, you see, I’m learning as I play.
I’m learning to be successful in work.
I’m preparing for tomorrow.
Today, I’m a child and my work is play.
Dear Families,

Welcome to the Early Childhood Center Preschool Program. We are happy that you have chosen our program for your child's preschool enrichment. We look forward to providing a year filled with exciting and rewarding experiences to all our preschool friends.

We hope the information provided in this handbook will help you to gain an understanding and appreciation for your child’s preschool experience. The aim of preschool is to provide a basic foundation for your child’s education and to make each child’s first experience with school a successful and happy one.

As teachers and parents we must remember, and keep in mind, that a positive self-image is the main ingredient to a child’s success. It is our job as parents and teachers to make this a priority.

As I look forward to the next 10 months, I am reminded of something I heard a long time ago. Knowledge enters the mind gradually, almost unconsciously. It is the teacher’s job to plant it like a seed, tend to it with encouragement and love, and nurture it while it grows and blooms. I believe the teachers, specialists, and support staff in our program provide such an atmosphere for all our students to grow and bloom.

Enjoy your year with us! We know we will enjoy the year getting to know all of our friends and families at the Needham Early Childhood Center.

Sincerely,

Diane Dunham
Preschool Coordinator
Philosophy and Mission
Our philosophy is based on the belief that children learn best in an early childhood program that provides developmentally appropriate educational experiences in an integrated setting. Our early childhood program is designed to provide a stimulating learning environment that supports the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of every child. In this engaging environment, children learn through appropriate play experiences that encourage active participation in learning. Teachers guide, support, and when needed, directly teach our children developmentally appropriate play and social skills. Our aim is to build a community of learners by providing children with enriching experiences to develop self-confidence, independence and strong cognitive and social skills. We respect the dignity, worth and individuality of each child and are committed to helping children achieve their full potential. Our goal is to help children grow up confident in their own identity and respectful of other people. The ECC recognizes the significant relationship among teachers, students, parents, and families and encourages continuous collaboration in a climate of mutual respect, cooperation and shared responsibility.

The Early Childhood Center
The Needham Public Schools offers integrated language-based preschool classrooms, serving 3 and 4 year olds. An integrated preschool includes typically developing children as well as children with disabilities. These classrooms offer children the opportunity to work and play with age-appropriate peers as well as children with developmental challenges. Children with disabilities excel in some areas, affording all children the opportunity to be models in some realm. As children work in group activities with their peers, they discover their similarities and develop a better understanding of their differences. Flexible, but consistent, structure and routine are offered, including activities designed to promote language/listening skills, gross and fine motor development, and opportunities for imaginative/dramatic play. Music, sensory activities, and a wide variety of developmentally appropriate materials and activities are employed, all of which support a strong foundation for learning. Weather permitting; outside play is a daily event.

The Curriculum
Based on the belief that children learn through play, active manipulation of their environment, life experience and communicating with peers and adults, the curriculum is designed to facilitate children’s involvement in their own learning. The curriculum is based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks: Guidelines for Preschool Curriculum Experiences. The program balances active and quiet play. Children work both alone and in small groups where teachers facilitate the children’s interactions with each other and their environment. Teachers observe each child’s activities in order to tailor
and expand curriculum to meet individual needs and interests. Teachers encourage parents to maintain close communication with staff, and work closely with parents to develop strategies for dealing with specific issues.

**Typical Daily Schedule**

Daily activities include a variety of active and quiet individual and group projects. A typical day may consist of the following: morning meeting, free play, art projects, cooking, creative expression, sand and water play, blocks, books, games, puzzles, science exploration and computers. (See example of one day at preschool at end of Handbook)

**Opening Day Schedule:**

Preschool Parent/Student Open House: Thursday, September 3, 2009

Open House Times:  AM Class - 10:00 – 11:00  PM Class - 1:00 – 2:00

*Open house occurs* within your child’s classroom. This is a time to allow your child to explore the class, meet their peers, meet other parents, teachers, preschool staff and prepare your child for the first day of school.

First Day of Preschool: Friday, September 4, 2009

- A.M. Session  9:00 – 11:30
- P.M. Session  12:30 – 3:00

**Lunch Bunch** is offered M, T, Th, F from 11:30 – 12:30  
**Lunch Bunch will begin Monday September 14, 2009**

**Curriculum Night for Parents (only): September 15, 2009 6:30 – 7:30PM**

You will begin in the Auditorium and then move to your child’s classroom.

**Early Release & Delayed Start Days:**

Preschool classes **are** in session on Early Release and Delayed Start days. If it is a delayed start there will only be PM preschool. If there is an Early Release Day there will only be AM preschool. There will be **no** Lunch Bunch or Extended Day available on Early Release or Delayed Start days.
**Staff**
Each preschool classroom is staffed with a preschool teacher, who is certified in early childhood and/or special education through the Department of Education of Massachusetts, and at least two teaching assistants. Additional staff members include Speech/Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapist, COTA (Certified OT Assistant), Physical Therapist, a School Guidance Counselor, School Psychologist, and a Pediatric Nurse.

**Communication with Staff**
While staff welcome and value the opportunity to meet and talk with parents, it is difficult for the staff to speak with parents when class is beginning or ending or while it is in session. Therefore, parents are encouraged to communicate through e-mail: first name_last name@needham.k12.ma.us (example: Diane_Dunham@needham.k12.ma.us)

Call 781-455-0416 to contact voicemail

Communication about your child’s progress can be discussed during a planned meeting with the teacher and specialists. The ECC staff prefers to discuss a child’s progress during a time when the Team is able to meet with you.

Teachers communicate classroom activities and events through weekly newsletters and schedules. Please check your child’s backpack on a daily basis to ensure you are updated. Please provide a backpack to transport books, notices, art projects and snacks. The school district is trying to be as green as possible, therefore, many notices will be provided on the Preschool’s e-mail list and the Newman Public School Website. At this site you can access each school’s website and the Preschool’s website.

**Conferences and Meetings**
Parent conferences and progress reports are offered twice a year. Conferences may be initiated by the parents or the teacher at any time during the year. Progress notes will be sent home twice a year, mid-year/January and in May.

It is best to talk openly when children are not present. Please arrange for a babysitter for conferences and meetings.
**General Information**

Calendar: The ECC program follows the Needham Public Schools academic calendar. Copies of the current calendar are provided to all parents at the beginning of each school year. On Early Release days there will be **no afternoon Preschool classes, Lunch Bunch or Extended Day**. On Delayed Opening days there will be **no morning Preschool classes, Lunch Bunch, or Extended Day**.

**No School Announcements**: School may be canceled or delayed if the weather is exceptionally bad or for some other emergency. Information will be broadcast over local cable TV; radio stations WBZ, WEZE, WEEI, WHDH and TV channels 4, 5, and 7. Please do not call the school department, or the Needham police or fire departments for "no school" information.

If conditions are almost safe, but the department of Public Works needs extra time to plow the roads or sand the streets, the school day will be shortened. Under this alternative plan, the opening of school and all bus pickups will be delayed for two hours. The **preschool a.m. session, lunch bunch and extended day program will be canceled** on days of **TWO-HOUR DELAYED OPENING** but the afternoon sessions will be held and dismissed at the regular time. Preschool screening and Team meetings scheduled for Wednesday mornings prior to 12:00 will also be canceled.

**Absences/Late Arrivals**

Please call 781-455-0416 x165 to report student absences.

If a child is going to be absent, please call the school and leave a message before 8:00 a.m. (answering machine allows for 24 hour calling). If your child is going to be late, he or she should check in at the front desk before going to class. If a student has to leave school early for some reason, please send in a note to the teacher/front desk alerting them to the time of pick-up, who will be picking him/her up, etc. The child will be accompanied to the front office at the appointed time and should be met there.

**Crisis and Emergency Plans**

Please note that during inclement weather, if you want to pick up your child early, you are encouraged to do so. **Parents must come to the school office** to sign out their child early, and they may not go directly to the classroom. A student information form will be sent home in early September, and should be filled out carefully by all parents and caregivers.
It is very important for parents to keep the school informed of any changes to phone numbers (work, home, cell phones, beepers, emergency contacts), address, day care schedules, etc. During an emergency situation, time is crucial so current data is essential to make sure your child arrives home safely.

**Arrival and Dismissal at School/Parking**
The Preschool entrance will be open at 8:55am. If for any reason you arrive at school after 9:10am, the preschool door will be locked and you will need to enter through the main entrance of Newman. The preschool entrance will remain locked throughout the day.

When driving your child to school for the 9:00am start time, please park in space designated as preschool spaces. Walk your child through the preschool entrance, put belongings in your child’s cubby and bring your child to the classroom door where a staff member will greet your child.

At pick up, please park in designated parking spaces and wait at the Preschool Playground area. Waiting on the patio is not permissible at any time during school hours. During drop off hours of 10:00am, 11:30am, and 12:30pm please wait at the Preschool Playground area only. Again, waiting on the patio area is not permissible at any time during school hours, due to our need to keep this exit area clear in case of an emergency.

*We ask that every effort be made to be prompt at arrival and dismissal times as a courtesy to all children and teachers.*

**Newman Playgrounds**
Playgrounds are not available for use by the families or other community members during the school hours of 9:00am – 3:15pm. Thank you for your cooperation!

**Permission Notes**
If your child is to be picked up by any person not already authorized to do so, you must send a note. The note should be dated, include the name of the person picking up the child, and must be signed by a parent/guardian. Please inform the person picking up your child that the teachers/office staff will ask for identification.

If your child is going to visit a classmate directly from school, you must send a dated and signed note containing all details of this change.


**Clothing**

Children should come to school comfortably dressed in play clothes (paint, glue, etc. may stain clothing). Please dress your child for outdoor play (warmer clothing/cooler clothing) as the weather changes. Please mark all clothing and other belongings with your child’s name. We would like to encourage closed toe shoes with a rubber sole for safe playground access and participation in active gross motor play. Winter boots should be large enough for children to avoid struggling when putting them on. Please send in an extra set of clothing, including underwear and socks to be kept at school (Please put these in a shoebox marked with your child’s name).

If your child wears diapers, please send a labeled package of diapers and a package of wipes. We will let you know when these items will need to be replenished.

**Snack**

The children will have snack each day. Please send in one snack and one drink. Please do not send in glass bottles or carbonated beverages. As a rule, we would like to discourage the use of sippy cups for preschoolers and encourage use of straws and open cup drinking to promote development. Occasionally, special snacks will be made/served (cookies, cakes, puddings, muffins, etc.) It is critical that parents inform the classroom staff of any allergies or other medical conditions that restrict your child’s diet. Birthday celebrations will be discussed by the teacher and the parents within each classroom to insure that all children’s needs are considered.

**Backpack**

Your child should have a backpack to transport books, notices, art projects and snacks. The backpack should be user friendly and the appropriate size for a preschooler. The backpack and snack containers should be appropriate for the child to learn to manage independently. Please check your child’s backpack daily since we will be communicating with you through written notices.

**Behavior Management Plan**

The goal of discipline is to assist and guide the children in the development of self-control. Teachers will discipline in a consistent way, based on an understanding of varying developmental levels. Simple and understandable rules will be established so that expectations and limitations will be clearly defined. Discipline will be constructive in nature, including such methods as diversion, separating the child from the situation, encouragement and reinforcements for appropriate behavior and effort.
**School Health**

The major goal of our school health program is to protect and promote the health of children within the preschool environment. School health records provide a confidential record of each child’s health status.

The information that we gather about your child’s health status enables us to identify children with special health care needs and to develop a health care plan that anticipates possible emergency situations.

The following information is required prior to starting the preschool:

♦ A physical exam within the past year
♦ Up to date immunizations
♦ Health assessment form
♦ Lead level

**Illness Guidelines**

Here are some guidelines that might be helpful in keeping your child as healthy as possible. As you know, preschoolers do not have the same kinds of self-care skills for a cold or infection as school-age children. Also, young children can be in very close contact with each other while they play. This information will assist you in making decisions about when to send your child to school if they are not feeling well.

♦ A Fresh Cold - Continuous nasal discharge, cough, watery eyes which has developed within the past 24-48 hours is considered contagious

♦ Fever - Must be fever free for 24 hours before returning to school

♦ Vomiting/Diarrhea - Keep at home for 24 hours after symptoms have resolved and the child can keep food and fluids down

♦ Strep Throat - Must wait 24 hours after antibiotics have begun

♦ Conjunctivitis - If conjunctivitis is diagnosed, your child will be prescribed eye ointment and should not return to school for 24 hours

♦ Head Lice - Until treated and has been checked by our school nurse
In addition, if your child is only mildly ill but is irritable and cannot fully participate in the day’s program, they should remain at home. If a child appears ill at school, the school nurse or staff will call you to come pick up your child as soon as possible. We can’t prevent all illness, but if we work together we can minimize the spread of germs. It is very important to keep the preschool nurse and/or classroom teacher aware and up to date on any medical conditions, and/or medications your child is taking. Please contact Nancy Solari – Preschool Nurse with any questions or concerns regarding your child’s health at school. (781-455-0416 ext. 386)

**Diapering/Toileting**
Toilet training will not be coerced. Generally, staff will assist you in carrying out the toileting routine upon which you have decided. However, please discuss this with your child’s teacher to ensure that the teacher is comfortable implementing the plan.

Children will wash their hands with liquid soap and running water after being toileted. Staff members will also wash their hands with liquid soap and running water after assisting children with any toileting routine. Individual paper towels shall be used to dry hands.

When handling clothing soiled with feces, urine, vomit, or blood, staff members will wear gloves and bag clothing in sealed plastic bags, storing them apart from other items.

**Unusual Circumstances**
If there are any unusual circumstances at home, such as illness or death, parents’ vacations, or changes in childcare arrangements (such as a new nanny or babysitter), please notify the teachers so that they can help your child adjust more easily to the situation.

**Parent Input**
The preschool staff recognizes the important role of parents in the learning process. We welcome and encourage you to take an active role in your child’s program. We also hope that you will enjoy new friendships with other families as a result of your child’s experience.

**Visitors**
For safety purposes, any non-school personnel – including parents – must report to the front office upon arrival at the school. If you have a scheduled appointment with a staff member or are volunteering in the school, you are required to sign in and get a nametag or a visitor’s badge. If you have an important message or something to deliver to your child during the school day, please leave it with the school secretary who will
make sure that the child gets whatever is needed in a timely manner. This policy is meant to keep disruptions to children's learning to a minimum as well as for safety.

**Classroom Visits**
Parents are welcome in the classroom. Volunteering in your child's classroom is at the discretion of the classroom teacher.

**Parent Volunteers Guidelines**

**Objectives of being a volunteer**
- To enhance the learning experience of the children
- Create an optimal learning environment for all the children
- Provide more one-to-one teaching to help reinforce and improve learning

**Guidelines for Volunteers**
All volunteers need to have a CORI check, please obtain a form in the preschool office or the district website. **Confidentially** - As a parent volunteer in the school you will be obligated to keep all situations you may witness confidential. This is for the protection of the children as well as for their families.

We will need you to keep the commitment you have agreed upon. If something interferes with your plan to come to the class as scheduled, please call to let us know as soon as possible. We can then make other plans and inform the children of the change. As we all know, children need structure and routine and some children will depend on your attendance. We would like to keep them from being disappointed as much as possible.

Volunteering in the classroom would entail working with all of the children. As you can imagine, your child may want a lot of your attention when you are in the classroom. Please discuss this matter with your child, and we will also reinforce this in the classroom. You will need to make other arrangements for your other children on the day you volunteer.

If any disciplinary issues arise while you are volunteering, please let a teacher know. Since we have a continued rapport with all of the children, it is best for us to handle these situations.

You are welcome to do an activity with the children, read a book and provide snack or just help out at an activity.
A schedule of volunteers will be made each month ahead of time for planning purposes. Please let the classroom teacher know if you cannot make it at the time scheduled for you. Attached you will find an agreement between the teacher and you. If you agree to the volunteer guidelines, and you are available at the needed times, please sign below and return to the classroom teacher. We appreciate helpfulness in the classroom and hope it will benefit all the children. In keeping with this goal, we are available if you have any questions.

Please remember to be on time. We encourage you to try to "blend in" without disturbing the class, when you arrive.

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Sample
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The volunteer agreement letter:

I agree to fulfill my commitment to volunteer in the Integrated Preschool. I understand that my volunteer assignment is: _________________ My teacher partner is:_____________________

A statement of confidentiality

I understand that it is important to respect all children and agree not to discuss a child or his/her actions with anyone except my teacher partner.

Signature ______________________________________
Date  _________________________________________
Address _______________________________________
Phone _______________________________________

Lastly, we hope the following information will be helpful to understanding some of the skills your child is working on in school through various parts of the day.

Meeting

Meeting time helps reinforce a sense of classroom community, respect for others, listening and language skills, turn taking, and self-esteem. Children learn to participate in a group and how to communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings. Children also learn to respect one another's ideas and feelings. The ability to communicate is one of the most important and essential life skills that a child can acquire. It takes time, patience, and experience to strengthen a child's ability to communicate.
**Learning Centers/Activity Time**

Periodically new learning centers are introduced. Each center is usually directly related to the present curriculum theme and/or specific skill that the children are trying to master. With each new theme, we try to integrate all areas of the curriculum, language arts, math, art, science and social studies.

Children have a chance to work independently at their own pace, as well as cooperatively with others. Center time also allows the teachers to move around freely to observe and work with the children individually, as well as in small groups.

Each center is designed with the student’s various developmental levels in mind. All children develop along the same continuum, but not all children develop at the same pace. This is taken into careful consideration when planning each leaning center.

**Choice Time**

Choice time is a time for children to explore and learn through numerous activities. Play practices and enhances concentration, imagination, cooperation, and creation. It allows a child to practice grown-up behavior and develop a sense of control over ones own world.

Choices during this time of day will include some combination of the following: block area, dramatic play, math manipulatives, writing center, reading area, listening center, puzzles, puppets, sand and water, table, science exploration table, painting/drawing, computer, legos, etc. Each area allows for children to work on a variety of skills and concepts. For instance, the block area is a place where children develop and use math skills such as measuring, estimating, classifying, predicting, counting, etc. Choice time activities may also tie into a various theme or skill that is being covered.

Choice time also allows the teacher to move about freely in order to facilitate and observe a child’s learning. We often refer to this type of assessment as "kid watching", where the teacher can gain important information regarding a child’s social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

**Snack Time**

Snack time is an opportunity for children to sit and relax and enjoy a healthy snack. Children engage in small group discussions during these times. Children often discuss various activities that occur both in and outside of school. This is an opportunity for children to build language skills through the communication of thoughts and feelings, practice social skills and reinforce table manners.
Outside Activity

Outside activity is an essential part of a child's development and learning experience. Physical activities that include running, climbing, skipping, and balancing enhance a child's large motor development. Expressing newly acquired physical ability and control heightens self-esteem. Outside activity is also beneficial in building a child's social skills, not to mention that this age group requires so-called "down time" or should we say "some time to run"!

Music/Movement Activity

Children are also given the opportunity to move within the classroom on a daily basis. Activities are based on the child’s creativity as well as specific movements that help the children focus their attention better. It is important to have specific motor activities that stimulate certain areas of the brain for attention and memory. Music is incorporated daily to facilitate language development, movement, enhance memory, sequencing and for general pleasure. Our experience suggests that most children truly enjoy and learn through music activities.

Motor Group

This is a schedule time during the week with the occupational and physical therapists and teaching assistant. In small rotating groups, the staff work with the children on concepts such as body awareness, motor planning, ball playing, balance, running, jumping, upper and lower body strength, etc.