

# □ Nursery School □

Nursery School, St. Patrick's early-childhood center, is comprised of five self-contained classrooms, two in the Nursery program (three- to four-year-olds) and three in the PK program (four- to five-year-olds). Leading each classroom are a head teacher and an assistant teacher, who work together to design an emergent, play-based curriculum. We call this curriculum "emergent" because it arises largely from students' interests. Teachers build lessons and adapt activity centers around student curiosity as they create learning environments to meet the various cognitive, social-emotional, communication, self-help, and motor development needs of the children. All Nursery School students (Nursery and PK) also leave their self-contained classrooms for science, music, and motor/physical education classes and spend an hour each day on the Nursery School Playground. In addition, PK students have Spanish instruction in their classrooms twice a week. All Nursery School students attend five mornings a week, and some depart at noon. The afternoon Lunch Bunch program, which extends the day until 2:50 pm, features a variety of enrichment activities in math, science, origami, movement, and art.

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**N**ursery School is a time when children begin to learn how to become productive and successful members of a community of learners who work, explore, and play together. Nursery School students assume increasing responsibility for themselves and for their interactions with others as they continue to make sense of the world through active exploration. Each day, children choose from centers and intentionally designed activities that invite them to explore abstract concepts and concrete knowledge and skills through verbal, visual, physical, auditory, and imaginative processes. These activities help them learn and practice skills across all developmental domains. Teachers design a school environment, using thematic units and investigations, to create opportunities for children to interact with each other, adults, materials, and the environment itself to promote age-appropriate skill and concept development. Consistent with the notion of an emergent curriculum, early-childhood teachers make it a priority to know their children well so they can respond to their interests, strengths, and needs and create learning experiences that are authentic and meaningful to each child. The strong working relationships our teachers develop through regular communication with parents are an important part of this process.

## □ Social and Emotional Development □

Beginning with a home visit before school opens, teachers build a strong relationship with each child and his/her family, which sets the stage for each student's success in the new learning environment. On the playground and in classrooms, children receive support developing independence, taking initiative, and gaining confidence in

their own abilities. Teachers help students develop the skills and provide opportunities to practice respectfully and meaningfully advocating for themselves. Students learn classroom routines, rules, and how to use materials purposefully. Morning meetings provide experience in turn-taking and sharing as well as opportunities to express opinions and feelings. Teachers guide children in learning to identify and express their emotions and recognize and respect those of their friends to help resolve conflicts appropriately. Teachers encourage and create safe opportunities for children to take appropriate risks, try, make mistakes, and persist. Weekly chapel services add a spiritual dimension to the children's evolving sense of self. Simple service activities such as making soup and trail mix for the Day School's service program encourage responsibility and stewardship.

## □ Cognitive Development □

Throughout the day in the Nursery School, children develop thinking skills by exploring, experimenting, and questioning. Both planned and spontaneous activities serve as stimuli for learning. Integrated within these activities are opportunities to expand logical thinking, acquire factual information, process increasingly complex directions, and build foundational skills in important disciplines including:

- **Language and Literacy**—Whole- and small-group meeting times, including morning meeting, story time, and sharing time, provide practice in listening and speaking as well as opportunities to lengthen attention span. Games, rhymes, and other activities help children expand phonemic awareness. As they progress through

Nursery and PK, children develop their verbal communication skills and, in time, move toward written communication skills through drawing or early writing. Teachers document classroom investigations and record dictation, creating class books and blogs for children and parents to read. In PK classrooms, literacy development occurs through morning meetings, the regular inclusion of classroom writing centers, and a systematic study of the alphabet, with concentration on consonant sounds. Regular story times with teachers and school librarians, coupled with ready access to classroom libraries and the Nursery School Library, support and further each child's interest in books and stories.

- **Mathematics**—Nursery and PK children actively construct a mathematical understanding of the world. As they use materials and participate in classroom activities, they encounter intentional and natural opportunities to build and shape this understanding. Intentional activities, such as counting and patterning exercises included in morning meetings, and natural opportunities made possible by the care with which teachers structure and observe the classroom environment provide children with regular opportunities to classify, work with data, and enhance their understanding of number, sets, and basic geometric and temporal concepts. Teachers ask questions and attend carefully to answers as play and inquiry lead children to measure, compare, combine, and separate quantities. The primary goals for these early mathematical experiences are to encourage reasoning and problem-solving, to instill interest and confidence, and to help children understand the many settings in which mathematical skills are applicable.
- **Science**—Through exploration in classrooms, on the Nursery School Playground, and in weekly science classes conducted by a science teacher, Nursery and PK children participate in hands-on activities that promote observing, questioning, predicting, and explaining. Children learn about plants, animals, simple physics, and ecology in ways that allow them to better understand phenomena they observe in other settings. Regular highlights of the science curriculum include investigation of the natural environment surrounding the school, a study of water, a spring incubation and hatch of ducklings, and an ecosystem study that dovetails with the annual PK music program.
- **Music**—Music classes scheduled twice in a six-day rotation help students develop musical competence through songs, chants, poetry, rhythm instruments, movement, and dance. In the context of a creative environment, children learn to match pitch within an appropriate developmental range, keep a steady beat, sing short solos, and listen with discrimination. Musical highlights include the Halloween Parade, the Nursery School-Kindergarten Christmas Pageant, and grade-level spring music programs that reflect the year's learning. These highlights also help students build confidence and begin to develop public speaking skills.

- **Art**—Recognizing that art is an essential vehicle for children to express their understanding of the world around them and their experiences in it, Nursery and PK classes integrate art materials and activities into daily life. Using a wide variety of materials and media, children have opportunities to create open-ended art and to complete specific projects, with collaborative work. The Nursery School hallway and classrooms are brightened by displays of individual and group work.
- **Spanish**—Meeting twice a week in PK, students are introduced to Spanish language and culture through stories, songs, poetry, dance, and movement. Students acquire new words and expressions naturally as they learn authentic songs and rhymes that help them internalize the language and develop accurate pronunciation skills. One of the main goals of PK Spanish is for students to become accustomed to listening to classes taught in Spanish. From the very first day, students listen to commands in Spanish and are encouraged to use the language in meaningful ways. Students learn how to respond to simple questions about their names, emotions, days of the week, colors, and shapes.

### □ Physical Development □

The outdoor and indoor learning environments of the Nursery School invite children to build new physical skills. Music classes encourage rhythmic and creative movement, while small-group physical education classes develop locomotor skills, basic body-control/gymnastic skills, and ball-handling skills through non-competitive games and activities. These activities give children frequent natural opportunities to refine their gross-motor skills, such as running, skipping, jumping, hopping, pedaling, climbing, lifting, and balancing. In the classroom, meanwhile, students have many activities to choose from, and these choices—including sand and water play, painting, drawing, using scissors, working with modeling materials, and using manipulative materials—enhance fine-motor skills. As children grow in skill, their creations reflect increased control and intention.

Children develop in cognitive, social-emotional, and physical ways according to individual developmental patterns. St. Patrick's Nursery School curriculum meets each child where s/he is, fitting the curriculum to the child rather than the child to the curriculum.