

## **Washington University Nursery School Preschool Curriculum**

At Washington University Nursery School, we believe that children are unique individuals with their own patterns and timetables for social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development. We support and encourage their development through our child-centered, process-oriented, play-based curriculum built on Constructivist theories and practices. Guided by the teachings of educational theorists including Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, DeVries, and others, we create a learning environment that addresses the developmental needs of the whole child by:

- Structuring classroom experiences around ideas and topics that are relevant to the students, with the understanding that knowledge is constructed through language, discussion, experimentation, and manipulation of objects that are meaningful to them
- Offering hands-on learning experiences that use a variety of materials, engage multiple senses, and encourage exploration, investigation, and learning
- Allowing each child to interact with the environment at his/her own pace, and creating opportunities for children to explore individually, with a partner, or with a larger group of peers
- Asking open-ended questions, allowing students the time to thoughtfully form responses, listening respectfully to their replies, and gently guiding them toward the answers they seek as they develop enhanced reasoning skills
- Respecting students' ideas, encouraging independent thinking, and empowering students to become problem solvers
- Using the wonderful resource of our diverse, multi-cultural population to highlight the similarities and differences between individuals, families, and cultures, celebrating the unique environment that is Washington University Nursery School.

Washington University Nursery School's open curriculum framework is presented in ways that are developmentally appropriate and based on our philosophy that children learn most effectively through play. Using a learning center approach, each teaching team offers experiences in art, writing, science, dramatic play, blocks, manipulatives, and literacy. Teacher planning takes into account the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical developmental needs of each child.

### **Social/Emotional Development**

Individual children's capabilities are valued and strengthened within the group throughout the curriculum:

- Building self-esteem through communication, planning, responsibility, problem-solving, participation, following directions, imagination and sharing within the group
- Developing skills in collaboration, compromise, self-expression, respect for self and others through experience, dialogue, and problem solving

## **Intellectual Development**

**Language** development is enhanced through:

- Verbally communicating and listening to others
- Dramatic play
- Listening to and telling stories
- Listening to music and singing songs
- Beginning to identify meaningful words – own name, friends' names, calendar words, job chart, etc.
- Dictating, drawing, and writing stories, and creating books of the child's own making

**Math** skills are being formed while children play. These activities involve:

- Identifying shapes, sizes, patterns, and sequences
- Sorting and categorizing into sets
- Counting and comparison, one-to-one correspondence
- Measuring length and weight
- Using numbers (as symbols and to represent quantity)
- Graphing

**Science** concepts are developed by:

- Observing seasonal changes related to weather, plant life, animal behavior and activities of people/families
- Sorting and categorizing items according to various properties
- Observing and/or collecting plants, animals, and insects in their environment
- Learning basic conservation of and respect for nature, as well as concept and practice of recycling materials and goods
- Growing plants from seeds and bulbs, observing stages of growth and parts of plants
- Exploring animals through hatching chicken eggs, butterflies, tadpoles, and more
- Discovering how magnets work
- Observing changes in matter through experiments with heat and cold
- Cooking and eating healthy snacks

**Social studies** concepts are introduced by:

- Learning about similarities and differences in peers and their families
- Inviting family members to visit school and share items or stories pertaining to their history, traditions, or culture; teach words in other languages; or read a book to the class
- Exploring the community through field trips on the Washington University campus and surrounding neighborhood
- Learning about occupations through books and personal visits and discussions with people holding a variety of jobs
- Experiencing multi-cultural customs, having hands-on activities with cultural materials
- Learning how people with disabilities experience life, how they deal with difficulties, and learning to view and respect each person as an individual
- Role-playing about families, occupations, abilities, or traditions

## Physical Development

**Gross motor** skills are developed, during indoor play and outdoors on the playground, using:

- Climbers, slides, trikes, scooters, swings
- Balls to kick, throw and bounce, bean bags to toss, bubbles to chase
- Sand to scoop, pour, dig
- Simple games and sport skills such as throwing, hitting and/or kicking a ball, playing hopscotch
- Hiking and exploring the campus
- Movement to music
- Building with large and small wooden blocks

**Fine motor** skills are developed throughout the day during such activities as:

- Tracing, copying, writing letters of the alphabet, writing in journals, etc.
- Using clipboards for portable writing or drawing desks in the classroom, on the playground and during field trips
- Drawing pictures, self-portraits, signing own name on paper, writing messages to friends
- Working with manipulatives such as stringing beads, Legos, nuts and bolts, spinning tops, sorting or creating a collage with small items like dried beans or peas

## Visual Arts

At Washington University Nursery School we offer children many opportunities to express themselves creatively and artistically. We value visual arts, music, and dramatic play as important building blocks in constructing learning. In the visual arts, the emphasis is on the process of exploring materials and how they can be manipulated, rather than the product of those manipulations. We allow children the time, space, and freedom necessary to achieve a successful and complete experience. These art experiences, whether undertaken independently or as part of a group, can help increase a child's attention span, improve fine motor skills, strengthen confidence and emotional well-being while building independence. Materials and experiences include:

- Drawing with crayons, pencils, chalk, markers, sidewalk chalk
- Painting with fingers, brushes, feathers, sponges, leaves, vegetables, and other materials and items
- Printmaking with rubber stamps, potato shapes, and various other objects
- Working with clay and doughs used for shaping, building, and modeling
- Cutting, tearing, gluing, and stapling
- Shaping/forming and stringing beads
- Creating collages from any combination of fabrics, paper, pictures, and a variety of three-dimensional items
- Building 3-dimensional constructions using boxes, paper tubes, cartons, and other recyclable materials
- Creating pictures or structures using wire, clay, wood and other materials

Students at Washington University Nursery School enjoy exploring visual arts, music and drama with specialists in these areas, in addition to the artistic opportunities that abound as part of their everyday curriculum in the classroom and on the playground.

The teachers at Washington University Nursery School observe and assess children's progress on an ongoing basis. Teachers consistently plan and adapt experiences within the curriculum to meet students' needs.

If one or more children need help in a specific area, the curriculum may be adapted in a variety of ways, which may include:

- Offering more one-on-one teacher-student time to understand the child's thinking process, build trust, and increase student confidence
- Offering more opportunities for exploration
- Simplifying an activity by removing stimuli
- Expanding an activity by adding components for exploration
- Appealing to different senses and ways of exploring materials than previously used in order to engage different parts of the brain in the learning process
- Planning individual, small group, and/or large group activities around a particular concept, skill, or area of concern

Parent/teacher conferences are held twice a year (Fall and Spring). Teachers take note of students' activities throughout the year in order to learn about each child, plan for individual and group needs, and communicate with parents on an ongoing basis. The Fall conference is informal – teachers meet with parents, relate to them the activities and progress of their child, and answer any questions they may have regarding their child's learning experiences. The Spring conference is more formal – teachers fill out an assessment form covering all areas of the curriculum, including personal observations, in order to provide a well-rounded picture of each child. The assessment is sent home before the scheduled conference so that parents have time to read and understand the material, and form questions they may have prior to the actual meeting.