



**Early Childhood
Supplemental Family Handbook
2023 – 2024**

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Section 1

Welcome

Welcome to CREC's Early Childhood Program. Our goal is to provide your child with a healthy, safe and developmentally appropriate learning environment. Each CREC school offers a unique theme that allows children to identify, refine and develop their talents and interests. Each school provides a diverse learning community that prepares children for living and learning as global citizens in a diverse environment. Our schools offer a personalized educational approach for each child in a curriculum designed to spark a lasting appreciation for knowledge. The focus of our early childhood curriculum is not just an accumulation of facts and skills but rather the strengthening of an ability to reason and think independently.

Mission of CREC Schools

The CREC Mission Statement is: Equity, excellence, and success for all, through high-quality educational services

Early Childhood Program Philosophy and Curriculum

We believe that children learn best in an environment where their interests and opinions are supported, their solutions to problems are encouraged, and active learning through play is valued. Our philosophy emphasizes respect for self, others and the classroom environment.

CREC's Early Childhood Program curriculum has its base in developmentally appropriate practice and uses the State of Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) as a guideline for curriculum development. The CT ELDS are learning and developmental outcomes to be intentionally addressed through planned experiences, materials and interactions. Learning outcomes are achieved through:

- a variety of hands-on discovery activities and materials on a daily basis that support learning goals
- responsive teaching staff who meet the individual needs of the children and families we serve
- reflective practices that create an environment of inclusion and honor diversity
- partnership with families that fosters strong reciprocal relationships and achieves mutually desired goals

Our curriculum is implemented using teacher observation and documentation to plan relevant, developmentally appropriate experiences where children can explore, experiment, play, and ask questions. We use the State of Connecticut Documentation and Observation for Teaching System (DOTS) in conjunction with the ELDS for collecting evidence about children's interests, abilities, skills and behaviors, for planning additional supports, for summarizing children's progress and communicating around common goals.

The STEM Theme

At the Discovery Academy, **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering and **M**athematics (**STEM**) will be integrated across the curriculum. Using children's natural curiosity, our students will learn reading, writing, and collaborative skills in an integrated approach. In all classrooms, the overarching theme will be STEM. Our young scientists will study the world by carefully observing, recording, and analyzing their environment to test their ideas.

Students will be supported in their individual interests, abilities, and needs. As we help our children become scientifically literate, they will learn to solve problems by thinking creatively and critically. Through outdoor investigations, students will understand their environment and its problems. Further, the use of inquiry-based instruction will be infused into language arts, mathematics and social studies lessons. This comprehensive and integrated approach will more fully prepare our students to achieve success in a rapidly changing world.

Our STEM-based theme is developed from the *Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)*. Our students will **learn, not just memorize**, knowledge in physical, life, and earth science. The program fosters persistence, open-mindedness, and an appreciation of science and the beauty of nature in our daily lives. To support our learning objectives, teachers and students use information technology including laptops, SMART Boards, SMART Tablets and iPads. Like adult scientists and engineers, students will use creative methods to solve problems, design and make models, as well as revise their work.

The **inquiry process skills** that support students' learning include:

- Observing – using the 5 senses to find out about the world
- Communicating – sharing information (speaking, writing, graphing, sketching, photographing)
- Classifying – observing similarities and differences of objects in order to group them
- Estimating & Measuring – making observations using numbers, often with tools (rulers)
- Inferring – drawing a conclusion from observations
- Predicting – using prior knowledge to make an educated guess
- Defining Operationally – creating a definition based on experiences
- Making Models – making a physical representation of an idea or object
- Investigating – hypothesizing, collecting & interpreting data, graphing,

controlling variables **The Instructional Model**

Our core learning cycle is based on the **5E** instructional model. This model is flexibly used and adjusted depending on the age of the child and the scientific problem being studied. The **5Es** are a stepwise teaching and learning strategy: **Engage**, **Explore**, **Explain**, **Elaborate**, and **Evaluate**.



The 5 stages are:

- **Engage** – promotes interest and connections to past understandings
- **Explore** – involvement with phenomena and materials to encourage new understandings
- **Explain** – communicate what has been learned
- **Elaborate** – teachers and students determine how much learning has taken place
- **Evaluate** – teachers and students check student understanding of knowledge and concepts by using rubrics, teacher observation, student interviews, projects, science notebooks, and portfolios

The advantage of an inquiry model is that it allows students to be in charge of their learning and use their teachers as guides. Your child's classroom teacher, in collaboration with a STEM theme coach, will introduce, implement and evaluate their progress in scientific knowledge and skills. At home, parents can support the STEM theme by listening to, discovering with, and seeing the world through the eyes of their child. Working together, our students, their families, and the school can prepare the next generation to meet the challenges they will face in the future.

Section 2 –Classroom Routines and Procedures

A Typical Day in our Program

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| Greetings/Attendance | Teachers greet families and children participate in table activities or read books with teachers and families. |
| Morning Meeting/ Circle | <p>This daily meeting brings the students and teachers together and is comprised of the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greeting and daily announcements • Morning message • Whole group activity • Songs • Social curriculum/community building |
| Snack Time | Self-help skills will be emphasized. |
| Small Group Time | Teachers initiate an activity focusing on the CT ELDS. |
| Centers/Choice Time | Children carry out play plans, play in learning centers with purpose, solve problems and construct knowledge. |
| Essentials | The students participate in at least one Essential class (music, visual-spatial, bodily kinesthetic, or library) each day. |
| Story Time | Teachers read stories to the class and children participate in literacy related activities. |
| Lunch | <p>Children may either bring lunch from home or buy it at school.</p> <p>Self-help skills will be emphasized.</p> |
| Recess | Children participate in energetic outdoor play and contact with nature. |
| Quiet/Naptime | Children rest/nap comfortably and listen to quiet music. |
| Closing Circle Time | The class reviews the day, shares a story or participates in movement games, or songs. |
| <p>We recognize that routine and structure are essential for a preschooler's sense of well-being. Therefore, each classroom has a predictable schedule from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.</p> | |

Safe Arrival and Departure

The Early Childhood Program is a full day, full week program. Children are expected to attend daily. It is important that each child begin and end the school day on time. When children arrive late to school they miss one of the most important components of the day, morning meeting. During morning meetings, the day's events are reviewed, children have the opportunity to greet one another and plan their day together. Thus, it is very important that children arrive on time for school. All children will be accounted for with a procedure developed by the classroom teacher that includes signing in at arrival and signing out at departure.

To ensure the safety of students, please:

- Park in designated spaces only
- Drive through the parking lot slowly
- Obey all traffic signs and designed traffic patterns
- Never drive by or park in front of a bus
- Be vigilant – please try to avoid using your cell phone in order to stay alert for pedestrians
- Follow the teachers' instructions who are on duty
- Do not double park

**Students will only be released to persons listed on the authorized pick-up/emergency contact lists maintained in the office. Should someone other than those listed on the form need to pick up the student, notification will need to be received in writing by the school. School personnel will request proper identification.

Using the Bathroom

As a preschool program, we do not have the essential equipment or staffing to meet optimal health standards for diapering children. Therefore, families are strongly encouraged to ensure that their children are toilet trained **before** starting in the Early Childhood Program at the beginning of the school year. The exception would be if this is identified in an IEP or 504 Plan. We understand the transition to school may result in some initial toileting accidents. We will work with the child's family to ensure consistency both at home and at school. Children should be as self-sufficient as possible. Children are more successful when they wear pants with no snaps, buttons or zippers. Pants with elastic waists and underwear (not pull-ups) support children's independence with toileting. Early Childhood teachers will provide reminders to guide and support children who have had a toileting accident.

Clothing

Children play daily with sand, water, paint and play dough. Smocks are provided for water play and painting but still sometimes, clothing gets wet or soiled. Children are encouraged to wear clothing that they do not mind getting dirty and that they can easily pull on and off by themselves as needed. Please provide your child with two sets of extra clothing at school at all times. This includes: easy to pull on/off pants, socks, underwear and shirts. **Please label all clothing with your child's name on them.**

Outdoor Play

We play outside every day, weather permitting. The school nurse informs the teaching staff if recommendations from health authorities or dangerous conditions prevent outdoor play. Please ensure your child comes to school with the appropriate outerwear. Please label all outerwear with your child's initials or name. Playground-safe shoes are important. Please ensure your child wears non-slip, closed toed shoes (sneakers are ideal).

Please apply UVA/UVB (SPF15 or higher) sunscreen protection on your child before school. Teachers do not apply sunscreen. Sunscreen is not allowed in children's cubbies. Please contact the school nurse if your child requires another application of sunscreen during the day.

When public health authorities recommend use of insect repellent due to high risk of insect borne disease, please apply this to your child prior to arriving at school. Teachers do not apply insect repellent. Insect repellent is not allowed in children's cubbies. Please contact the school nurse if your child requires another application of repellent during the day.

Snacks/Meals

Daily snacks are an important part of meeting the nutritional needs of young children. Snacks include:

- fruit/vegetable
- dairy (cheese, yogurt, milk)
- meat or protein (beans)
- bread (crackers)

If a child has food allergies, the school nurse will develop a care plan that will be shared with all relevant teaching staff.

We are not allowed to offer children high risk foods for choking such as whole grapes, nuts, popcorn, hard pretzels, raw carrots, raw peas, or hot dogs. This applies to foods served as well as foods brought from home.

Lunches

PK Students eat at specific times each day. Discovery Staff are with the students during their lunch time. You have the option to either purchase lunch or bring lunch from home. We are not allowed to heat food brought from home.

Rest Time

Our daily schedule includes a balance of quiet and active activities. Rest Time is scheduled for one hour each day with a settling in period beforehand. We provide mats for your child to sleep on. Please provide a **small** blanket that can be easily stored in your child's cubby. Please label this blanket with your child's name on it. This blanket should be taken home each Friday afternoon to be laundered and returned the following Monday.

Toys From Home

Please keep toys from home at home, as they can be lost or broken at school. A small stuffed animal is acceptable for rest time.

Celebrations (birthdays and holidays)

Discovery Academy has introduced a practice of non-food celebrations. Not only does this help promote the idea of healthy eating in school, it helps reduce the potential for exposure to allergens for students with allergies or medical conditions. You are encouraged to touch base with your child's teacher to discuss options for celebrations; all plans should be made in collaboration with the teacher ahead of time.

Party Invitations

Invitations can only be distributed at school if every student in the class is invited.

Section 3 – Health and Safety

Handwashing Practices

Young children are particularly susceptible to illness once they begin school, affecting health and causing missed educational opportunities. While illness is not always preventable, we take measures to reduce the risk of infection by practicing good hand washing and cleaning procedures. We will teach the proper handwashing procedure as part of our curriculum, and we ask all children to wash hands upon arrival, before and after meals, after playing outdoors and after using the toilet. We will use hand sanitizers as an alternative when hands are not visibly soiled.

Section 4 – Home-School Communication

Communication between Family and Teacher

A strong family-school partnership is important to the success of our Early Childhood Program. In addition to the Family-Teacher conferences held over the year, each teacher sends home regular updates via Seesaw, newsletters and or emails keeping families apprised as to what is happening in the classroom. Drop-off and Pick-Up times are an opportunity to share brief updates or ask quick questions of your child's teacher. You may also contact your child's teacher by phone or email.

Volunteering

If you would like to volunteer in your child's classroom, please arrange a time to do so with your child's classroom teacher. You might like to plan a special activity around the unit the children are concentrating on or you might want to do a cooking project with the children. You may want to read a story to the children or help them write their own! We hope you will consider volunteering in the classroom. It is an ideal way to see what the children are working on and how learning through play is valued. As a volunteer, you are expected to maintain confidentiality.

Conferences

Parents and guardians are encouraged to become partners in their child's educational success. Family conferences are scheduled in September, December and March to discuss your child and report cards will be handed out in December and March. Additionally, conferences with teachers may be held at any time during the school year. Parents and students, as well as teachers, counselors, or administrators, may initiate a conference.

A parent or student may arrange a conference with an individual member of the school staff or a group conference with school staff members. Such conferences are held during school hours but every effort will be made to accommodate parent schedules.

End of Year Transitions

At Discovery Academy, the Early Childhood Program is a two year program. Children attending preschool for the second year generally stay in their present classroom with their current teacher for the second year. At the end of each school year, teachers will help prepare each child for the transition to summer and for kindergarten if eligible. Children moving on to kindergarten will visit the kindergarten classrooms to familiarize themselves with the new environment.

Under some circumstances, the pre-school teacher and the principal may recommend to the family that the child should remain in the preschool program for a third year because they believe developmentally the child would benefit from an additional year. In most cases, children who are age-eligible will move on to kindergarten. To ensure a smooth transition, preschool and kindergarten teachers meet to discuss individual children's needs at the end of preschool.