

First Church Preschool

" Learning by Experiencing "

Student Handbook

First Church Preschool
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GENERAL INFORMATION

Background/History

The First Congregational Church Day Care & Nursery Inc. is an innovative childcare program providing full-day care with a morning-program nursery school experience and is housed in the First Congregational Church on the Cheshire Green. Marilyn Donovan, the first Director, and Karen Kaczynski, then Director of Christian Education, worked with various Church committees in early 1994 to create and start up this program as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and eventually receiving the necessary support. Funding for this project was borrowed from the Church congregation in September 1994. By November 1994 the Center became incorporated. Renovations were quickly under way in order to be licensed by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. On January 3, 1995 the center was issued their initial operating license. The childcare center is not an extension of the Church or its religious program, but rather a caring and dedicated separate child-centered program trying to meet the many needs of families with young children. The Program continues to operate as a non-profit organization and is overseen by its own Board of Directors.

We strive for our First Church staff to be teachers, experienced and knowledgeable in early childhood. All Head and Co-Teachers, in our pre-school hold at least an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood, or at least a Bachelor's Degree in a related field, and have experience and knowledge in the area of early education. Our teachers work together as early childhood professionals to create caring, developmentally appropriate environments for young children.

After an intense two-year self-study and validation process, we were Accredited in June 2004 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. This is a big achievement and recognition of the quality of our preschool program.

During the 2006-2007 school year, our Director position was changed to be an administrative and leadership position instead of including within it a Head Teacher position. At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, our founder and original Director, Marilyn Donovan retired. The Board and various committees worked to find and hire our new Director, Dawn DeFeo to carry on the philosophy and mission of this preschool as founded.

Philosophy/Goals

Young children learn by doing. The work of Piaget, Montessori, Erikson, and other child development theorists, and researchers has demonstrated that learning is a complex process

that results from the interaction of children's own thinking, interests and experiences in the external world.

Knowledge is not something that is given to children as though they were empty vessels to be filled. Rather, children acquire knowledge about the physical and social worlds in which they live through playful interaction with objects and people, thus our logo Learning by Experiencing. "Children do not need to be forced to learn: they are motivated by their own desire to make sense of their world." (Developmentally Appropriate Practices, NAEYC). We, as teachers, are facilitators of play, for we view play as essential to the development and growth of every child. In the context of imaginative play, children are able to set up and resolve social and emotional conflicts, extend their ideas about the world, expand conversational skills and develop thinking skills. The social interactions that evolve from play opportunities lead the child toward greater emotional understanding of his or her self, and of others.

We encourage thinking skills by providing a stimulating and supportive environment. We offer a curriculum rich in concrete experiences that expand the child's knowledge and understanding of their world. Through individual and group activities, skills in communication, language development, social studies, mathematics, science, pre-reading, pre-writing and problem solving are strengthened. We support the notion that children learn by manipulating, exploring, discovering, creating, and questioning. In every endeavor, children take an active role in the learning process without pressure or fear of failure.

We provide for the emotional development of children by building confidence, trust, and independence. We want children to enjoy the school experience, to feel good about separating from their parents and to deal with their thoughts and feelings in constructive ways. We help children in learning to join, to understand, and to accept the responsibility of membership in a group. We also stress the importance of making and accepting consequences of decisions.

We believe it is very important to work supportively and in partnership with parents, together making up the significant people and experiences of a child's daily life, aware of our separate and shared input. We record developmental assessments for each child, which are shared at Parent Conferences, and together create goals for each child's preschool experience.

We provide a 4 hour Morning Program and consecutive day schedules to help children feel really settled and connected here, before it is time to leave. We have found this better supports separation issues and allows a slower pace in the classroom, with enough time to delve into the learning process and fit in all we offer here each morning!

Curriculum

Our curriculum offers opportunities for learning and skill development in the areas of language arts, science, social studies, mathematics, music, creative arts, and physical development. Children are encouraged to make choices and to participate in a range of activities that include play with paint and crayons, clay and play-dough, water, sand, blocks, dolls, dress-up and dramatic play, music and movement, cooking, and care for plants and animals. Outdoor activities include the use of swings and climbers, sand and digging boxes, water tables, tricycles, open space and gardens. Teachers organize activities and set up indoor and outdoor environments so that children can play by themselves, with others, and with a variety of materials that encourage skills such as: problem solving, artistic expression, small and large muscle control, visual and auditory discrimination, hand-eye coordination, and knowledge of the surrounding world. We strive to provide a safe environment in which children can feel good about themselves, develop respect and pleasure in relationships with others, and feel comfortable at “school” while away from home.

Goals of particular parts of the curriculum are outlined in the following section.

Language Development

Language development is an integral part of the program with emphasis on children learning to talk and to listen to each other, to share feelings, ideas and information, and to enjoy books by “reading” and being read to, and by acting out and writing stories together. We believe that written symbolic understandings of concepts (with such activities as spelling, recognition of written letters and words, and written mathematical equations) should come after, not before children have hands on experiences with three-dimensional realities. We do not formally teach written letters, written words, numerals to three and four year olds. Rather, an abundance of opportunities for purposeful writing and reading are provided through play experiences such as creation of menus in restaurant play, recipes when cooking, writing boards for office and doctor play etc. These assist in preparation for later formal mastery of the alphabet and numerals.

Manipulative Games and Puzzles

These are materials which provide experiences with part/whole relationships, matching, designs and patterns, sequencing, one-to-one correspondence, shape and form, eye-hand coordination, likeness and differences, number, size, estimating and comparing. Working alone and with others with manipulative materials, children engage in problem solving and completion of tasks in very concrete ways. Many of these materials develop readiness skills and concepts that will be the building blocks for success in their formal school experience.

Big Blocks and Dramatic Play

Dramatic play allows children to work through their own understandings, perceptions, feelings, and fantasies of the world through the use of make-believe, pretend, and imaginary play. By trying on roles during play, children learn about the social world, what people do, where they work, how they interact. During the course of the year, props in this area will vary, giving children a chance to explore various roles and social situations. Some examples are a doctor's office, grocery store, restaurant, post office, construction site, etc., Children also get exposed to and have opportunities to learn the appropriate vocabulary and skills that may be involved in these situations. Use of large wooden "hollow blocks" promotes strength and development of large muscles while enhancing and encouraging dramatic "pretend" play, spatial awareness and social interactions.

Unit Blocks

Block building offers children the opportunity to become a mathematician, stage designer, storyteller and architect, while discovering the concepts of counting, patterning, shapes, symmetry, size, balance, and stability. Block building also affords the child the opportunity to work cooperatively with classmates enhancing their ability to problem solve while using their imagination and creativity. Blocks offer an almost infinite variety of expressive opportunity from floor patterns or designs, to incredible engineering feats of tower building, with increasing skills over time and remain a means, rather than an end in the learning process.

Sand and Water Play

Through mixing, digging, filling, emptying, pouring, patting, sifting, and molding with sand, children learn about continuous quantity, texture, and physical attributes. Like many materials, which are available in our program, sand is an open-ended material lending itself to exploration, experimentation, and discovery. As children try their ideas over and over, they begin to see relationships, many of which are basic to later understandings in math and science. Sand play may also include imaginary play such as when making roads and tunnels, or turtles building nests, etc., as children again act out their experiences in the world.

Water is a natural and absorbing medium for play. It also has a wonderfully calming effect on young children who are anxious or feeling stressed. With water, children can learn about measuring, pouring, objects that float and sink, dry and wet, absorption, hot and cold. Children can also engage in dramatic play with water when bubbles, sponges, dolls, boats, whales, or dishes are added to the water to play with or to wash. This type of imaginative play with others helps in developing vocabulary, taking turns, and problem solving.

Books

As a source of many kinds of information, books give children greater understanding of their world. They can also help children clarify their feelings and concerns by describing situations, which are similar to their own. At an age of rapidly developing language development, books contribute to word and concept recognition. Children gain a sense of mastery as they "read" a familiar book on their own, telling the story from memory. Familiarity with books contributes significantly to children's motivation to learn to read. It also strengthens the concept that things written down have meaning, which is the beginning of literacy and so important today, in a television watching, and computer gaming world.

Calendar and Use of Symbols

The horizontal calendar strip (linear calendar) in our preschool classrooms is easiest for children to follow. It introduces children to the left to right direction they will later use in reading, as well as representing the linear flow of time. Spaces marked with a house on it are "home days" or the weekend. Each day, the child whose symbol marks the day can have special jobs to do at meeting time. Other symbols representing events known to the children are added to the calendar and as children count forward and remember back to those times as they begin to concretely understand today, tomorrow and yesterday.

When children begin in our school, they are given a choice from several "symbols" which are simple hand drawn pictures that they will use as a representation of themselves, and that will also be paired with their names. They will keep this symbol until they leave the Four's Room. All the children quickly learn their own, and everyone else's symbol. They recognize it as a beginning symbolic language and representational system at school. The pictures are easy enough to duplicate on their own eventually, and becomes a successful written experience in preparation for writing letters later on.

Art

Through art, children problem solve, express their thoughts, feelings and individuality, and begin to represent their world. In a developmental art program, children develop a sense of self-esteem that comes with accomplishment, imagination that comes with experimentation and motor control that comes with practice. Fine motor coordination and finger strength grow and develop as children paint, draw, sculpt, cut and paste. They also learn about color, form, texture, and pattern while increasing readiness skills for later academic success.

The goal of our art program is to motivate and challenge children to use an ever-changing variety of art media. We provide opportunities for this to occur on a daily basis, with a wide selection of materials, as they are encouraged to be their own inventors. We are not concerned with the product, but with enabling a process that provides learning and skill development as the child creates. Hence the child's artwork is not just to make something in order to bring a product home, but rather to meet the many developmental goals of childhood. We strive to let each child know that they need only to please themselves with what they have created and that they are the sole owners of their creations.

Cooking

Each class cooks their own snack about every other week, as cooking is important in many ways in the curriculum. Through cooking experiences, children can take pride in being able to do something basic for themselves, and each other that is usually done for them. They may prepare something to eat that is beloved and special, or try new things. They can learn about food of a culture different from their own, or participate in preparing food for a special event, holiday, class picnic or a parent visit. They develop small motor control and have a chance to use special tools such as a carrot scraper, potato masher, measuring spoons, sifter, etc. Often children are more willing to attempt eating something new if they have participated in its preparation, thus expanding their food experiences.

Music and Movement

With singing, dancing, finger-plays, using simple instruments, moving their bodies in planned and spontaneous ways, and in listening to music, children have opportunities to develop their muscles, learn to follow directions and take turns, develop rhythm and balance, learn new stories and phrases, become more aware of their own and other's bodies, develop their singing voices and sharpen auditory functioning, all while having fun with sound!

Each class learns many songs over the course of the year and many quickly become class favorites that they actively engage in and share at home. Music is involved daily in every class in a range of ways such as for cleanup and rest time music, to begin meeting times, as part of the curriculum, and to occupy children at transitional moments while waiting to wash hands, etc. We also plan for monthly "whole school" sing alongs as the younger children learn a lot from watching and participating with the older children, and all of us together experience a sense of our whole school community. This is also a time that provides small groups and individuals a chance to perform in front of their peers!

Science

Science is integrated into the curriculum with many activities that involve both physical and natural sciences. Children explore physical sciences with many activities, especially in water play and sand play, unit blocks, color mixing, woodworking, cooking, and outdoor play. In these activities children experiment with many physical science concepts on a concrete level, such as solids, liquids, sinking, floating, wet and dry, pressure, motion, speed, weight, gravity. Children have opportunities to use tools which extend their capacity to understand and construct their own physical realities including shovels, funnels, blocks, nesting measures, ramps, straws, magnifying glasses, outdoor swings, flashlights, pulleys, eyedroppers, bubble blowers, wheels, gears, scales and balances.

The natural sciences play an active part in both the outdoor and indoor curriculum. Children have many opportunities to observe and experience the natural world. Activities are frequently inspired by the seasons and the weather, -watching leaves change, collecting different colors of leaves, planting bulbs and flowers and vegetables, caring for our rabbit, toad, hamster or other class pet, measuring snow and watching it melt inside, and carefully observing our famous horse chestnut tree through each of the seasons.

Math

As with language development, we do not introduce formal written symbolic math to three and four year olds. Through their play children are provided many opportunities and varied experiences to work with numbers and numerals in a natural and concrete way. We write numbers on the calendar, and keep track of the days and months. Children get practice counting, as they help set the table for lunch, snack, set out mats, etc. We provide them with many activities that include mathematical concepts with counting songs, stories, and rhymes. With manipulative materials children explore size, shape, pattern, and one-to-one correspondence through arrangement of blocks, colored cubes, pegs, and unifix cubes, providing other opportunities to reinforce counting skills.

Large Motor Sequences/Climber Boxes

Each room is equipped with wooden "climber boxes" of varying sizes that are arranged with stairs, slides, and ramps to provide different motor sequences which give experience with direction on a gross motor or whole body level, with a place to begin, challenges about how to proceed and satisfaction with completing the process. Children have an opportunity to climb on this equipment as a place to focus their physical energy in the classroom and to test and strengthen their muscles in appropriate ways. It provides opportunities to develop and improve skills in depth perception, balance, turn taking, focus, and body control. These climbing sequences are a very important, active and busy aspects of our program adapted from the Early Intervention Program at Darcey School.

Outdoor Play

We provide space, time and equipment for active, noisy outdoor play in **all** seasons and weather condition except when severe or dangerous. Outdoor play is not merely a time to "expend energy", rather, a time where growing and learning take place out of doors. It is a time for large motor development and freedom of movement in open space, as well as a time for using loud and exuberant voices. Children enjoy using trikes, water, sand and mud, climbing, running, digging for worms, swinging, and participating in simple outside games. It is also a time for developing an awareness of the natural world - sky, trees, dirt, plants, puddles, worms, bugs, ice, snow, wind, and for breathing outside clean air, especially in the winter, away from dry, heated indoor air and germs. We go out for an extended period of time every day, as outside playtime is an important and integral part of our program at First Church and our playground is quite extensive.

Holiday/Seasons

Although we feel it is important that there is no required sequence of units in our curriculum, teachers do plan activities around themes inspired by children's general experiences and developmental concerns. These themes are also inspired by observation of the seasons, such as collecting and comparing shape and color of fall leaves, measuring and building snow sculptures in the winter, planting bulbs and growing gardens in the spring and by events in a child's life, such as setting up a doctor's office in the dramatic play area when a child has been particularly sick, or bringing in suitcases for packing when families are taking trips or moving. We do not expect all children to participate unless these activities interest them.

In relation to holidays as part of the curriculum, we feel that school should remain the safe, secure place that we strive for from the beginning **without** the invasion of a lot of holiday activities. We try to slowly let some of the symbols and activities of major holidays into classrooms eventually, in order to give children the opportunity to play out their experiences and perceptions, but we try to keep school a sort of refuge from all the hectic energy and excitement around holiday time. We put much more focus on seasonal changes as a way of including and responding to diverse traditions and therefore spend much time investigating seasonal changes as a basis for curricular activities.

This means we do not have big parties and celebrations here to recognize major holidays, and we do not have a religious program as part of our curriculum.

Guidance/Discipline

Children need to have the opportunity to fully explore their environment and their social connection to others in order to establish a sense of independence, trust, connection, and self-esteem. At times this means they will test, challenge, and defy both the materials and people within their environment. As early childhood professionals, we feel that a child's emotional development progresses in stages, like all other aspects of development, and that children need time and maturity to develop mastery and behavioral control. It is our responsibility to nurture, support and assistance to all of the children and to help each of them find constructive ways to express their feelings and needs.

Limits at any age are essential in terms of safety, security, and protection of all individuals. These limits must match the level of development and the individual needs of each child. Because young children are only beginning to fully grasp the causes and effects of their behavior, it is the responsibility of the adults present to set clear limits. When setting limits, it is important to let children know what is expected, why certain behaviors are unacceptable, and what might be an appropriate alternative. Simple language, caring, patience, and consistency are the keys. If a pattern of unacceptable behavior persists, a child may be gently but firmly removed from the situation and redirected to another area, or kept close to a teacher until that child seems ready to return to play. Redirection to a different activity, changing the space, schedule, or the pacing of the day, reinforcement of positive behaviors, and intervening before the behavior starts, or has a chance to get out of control, are some appropriate and effective techniques used to help young children learn to participate in a group.

From time to time written handouts may be available at the Parent Sign In table on specific aspects of development that may be of interest to you. Also, be sure to talk with teachers about any areas of concern. We may be able to provide some additional support or resources.

Tuition/Payment Schedules

Tuitions are contracted with the Director when enrolling your child into the program based on the regular weekly hours and program selected (see brochure). Monthly tuition payments are formulated by multiplying the regular scheduled weekly fee times the weeks we are open, which does not include the Christmas or optional weeks, (regardless of the number of weeks in the month) and dividing by 10, to arrive at ten equal monthly payments due the first week of each month as marked with arrows on the enclosed school calendar. A tuition deposit of \$ 100 is required upon acceptance into the program, which will be deducted from the initial September tuition payment. There will be a \$10.00 late fee for payments made after the 15th day of the month. **No reduction in fees can be given for absences of a child due to illness, vacations, or weather emergencies.**

If you need to add additional hours or days to your contracted schedule, please check with the Director first and classroom teacher for availability. Choices include adding an additional Morning Program, Full Day or Full Afternoon only. No single hours are available. We will complete an "Additional Hours Form" which you and the classroom teacher will use to keep track of all additional hours beyond the normal weekly schedule and tuition amount. One form is to be filled out per month or per week as needed and paid at the end of the month before or with the next monthly tuition.

Closings/Weather Emergencies/Optional Weeks

We are closed for legal holidays as listed in your Brochure and on the enclosed Calendar. In addition, we follow the Cheshire Public School schedule and are **closed on snow days** as called by the Superintendent of Cheshire Schools, for reasons of safety and liability here at the Church. Please listen to your radio or local television station in the early morning if the weather is severe, for announcements about Cheshire closings. If Cheshire Public Schools are closed, we will also be closed, so please have a backup plan available *before hand*. When there is a 90-minute delay, we will have only a one-hour delay and will be open by **8:30 AM for Full Day** children, (weather/roads permitting) and **9:30 for Morning Program** children to insure adequate staff coverage. The parking lots and walks should be shoveled and sanded by then and staff will be here to greet you. Children will be dismissed at their regular time. If public school is called off early because of later day severe weather, we will be calling parents to come as soon as they can, so children, parents and teachers will be able to travel home safely.

We will offer a credit or the possibility of school make-up days if more than three snow days have been called. In the case of fire or other severe weather emergencies, children will be gathered together in the safest physical area of the church building, which may include the Whiting House next door, to wait for parents who have been alerted by the Director, to come and get them. An emergency plan is posted above the sign-in table for evacuation procedures from this building, which includes use of Cheshire Town Hall if necessary. Please review.

Optional weeks are weekdays that are not part of your normal program contract, because they occur when the Cheshire Public Schools are closed for winter and spring vacation, causing different schedules at home and school for families with children in public school. Our regular program is also closed and you are NOT paying for those days in your normal monthly tuition payment. You must contract for your child to attend on those days separately. A form will go home a few weeks before the time approaches to alert you to these optional days, and to provide you with the opportunity to sign up for specific schedules as needed. We must have a minimum of 5 children enrolled for each day in order to create and pay for a daily program.

Kindergarten & Pre-Kindergarten Program in The 5's Room

The Kindergarten program is set up for a group of up to 8 five-year-olds who attend either the morning or afternoon session of Kindergarten at Darcey School. They may be bussed to and from First Church each day and are supervised by staff when getting on and off the school bus on Route 10 in front of the Church. Kindergarten children have their own corner room. Because they are in a highly structured school environment at Darcey School, our goal is to provide a semi-structured program with a balance of freedom and activities, a place to unwind before or after the work of Kindergarten, in an environment that is interesting and engaging and provides some opportunities for social interaction and growth.

We have also added a Pre-Kindergarten Program for young five-year-olds (usually fall birthdays) who could use an extra year after the Four's Room, for further maturity and development, before going off to Kindergarten the following year. These children have the opportunity to not repeat the Four's Room, but to join with the AM-Before-Kindergarten or PM After-Kindergarten groups with a total of 8 children in each group. This small mixed group of 5-year-olds will work together in a structured five-year-old environment, participating in different,

higher-level activities for literacy and learning in teacher directed setting with a smaller **peer** group.

Before Kindergarten group children have lunch here at First Church before leaving for Darcey School. Upon the arrival of the After Kindergarten group, Pre-K children are joined by them for lunch. Those children leaving at the end of lunch will be dismissed with our other morning friends at 12:30. Morning and afternoon snacks are provided here as well. Pre-K and kindergarteners in the 5's room also have outside time in the morning and afternoon, as they do not always go outside at Darcey School. There is a short 20-minute rest time in the After-Kindergarten program. This is an opportunity for the children to simply rest and allow their bodies to get re-organized not as sleep-time since it is no longer usually needed. They listen to relaxing music or to a book on tape.

During free-play, choices of inside activities include art, science, board games, manipulatives, blocks, writing center, stories, and computer work, all on a five-year- old level. The afternoon group will eventually merge with the younger groups late in the afternoon, after 4 PM, as staff and children begin to leave for the day and numbers decrease. We are happy about this Pre-Kindergarten program and being able to meet the needs and interests of these older children, as they continue to get ready to step out into the world of the bigger school.

Financial Assistance

First Congregational Church Day Care & Nursery (First Church Preschool) is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization with a demonstrated commitment to the community it serves. To that end, occasionally there limited resources may be available for the financial assistance of students and their families in the form of discounting or waiving of tuition for a limited period of time. In order to maintain privacy, all financial assistance decisions are made at the discretion of the Director and consultation with the Hardship Committee.

DAILY LIFE

What To Bring To School

- Every child should have a **complete change of clothing**, appropriate for the season, in the provided, labeled, canvas bag that is above their cubby. Be sure to restock regularly, especially as seasons change or your child grows.
- Every child should have a **labeled lunch box or lunch bag** with their daily lunch, drink, napkin and any utensils they may need.
- Every child should be **dressed for the weather** of that day. Included should be boots and snowpants regardless if there is snow on the ground, for mud or snow from December through March.
- For rest time, full-day children should have a **small** pillow and blanket and **one** soft toy that easily fits in their nap crate.

Hours of Operation

Our Center officially opens at 8 AM although with permission from the Director some children may arrive after 7:30, when necessary, and closes **promptly** by 5:30 PM Monday through Friday. **We are closed for major holidays (see enclosed calendar), Christmas week, and snow days called by the town of Cheshire.** Emergency contacts will be made if a child is not picked up by 12:45 PM for part-day and 5:35 PM for full-day programs. There will be a charge of \$5.00 for each fifteen minutes of beyond the scheduled pick-up time. If late pick-ups become a problem, we will have to double the charge to discourage lateness. We are sympathetic about an emergency late day, but habitual lateness creates many problems for our teachers. If you want or need time to talk to a teacher or other parent before leaving, plan to be here by 12:25 PM or 5:20 PM. It is important that all morning program children to be on their way by 12:45 so the full-day program can begin its procedures for naptime and the rest of the day. It may be somewhat traumatic to a young child to be the last one and to be waiting, so **it is important to be here on time.**

Arrival and Departure

Children must walk into the classroom each morning accompanied by a parent to insure proper supervision. Morning Program children will meet their parents in the **Center Space** after lunch, for the end-of-the morning pick-up. You **must also sign your child in each morning and out again in the evening at the table in the central area.** This is to meet State regulations. The names of any persons other than parents who are authorized to pick up children must be listed on the child's Release Policy Form before children are allowed to leave with someone else. If a different temporary arrangement is needed, please include a written and signed permission note for your child's teacher. A picture ID may be requested at pick-up time to insure safety. If you have concerns about who may not pick up your child, please alert us. If your child will not be attending school, please call to notify the teachers (preferably between 8 and 9 AM), and always call for any changes in bus transportation to and from Darcey Kindergarten so we are always aware of the number of children we are putting on or getting off the bus. We do not want to have to track down a missing child.

Separation and Adjustment

During the initial weeks of the program we expect to work in partnership with parents to ensure as smooth and comfortable of an adjustment as possible. Bridges between home and school are being built with your child's visits to the Program during the Open House just before school begins and with welcome notes sent to each home. These are intended to help with separation and adjustment issues. More help may be needed however, such as staying with your child for a period of time each morning, reduced hours until your child feels secure with the staff and routines, or some other individual arrangement, which we will plan together. While children generally adjust readily to our caring, supportive program, healthy development can include some forms of regression, such as more clinging than usual, or some loss of independence for a time. We expect considerable variation in this significant area. We plan to work together to make your child's experience a positive one.

Meals

Please send nutritious lunches, remembering **no candy or gum** is allowed at school and that we do not microwave or warm lunches. We allow "desserts" or sweets after a good attempt is made at eating the main course, however, a good way to cut down on power issues at lunchtime is by sending all healthy items. Lunch items in need of refrigeration can be placed in the refrigerator daily on the appropriate tray with their name or symbol marked on **each** item. The state also requires that an ice pack is included in each child's lunch box to keep things cool. Partially eaten food will be returned home in the lunch box so parents can be aware of what and how much their child is eating. We provide snacks twice a day and cooking activities regularly. Menus and recipes will be posted. Please be sure to inform us of any food allergies your child may have during the registration process.

Lunch is a busy social time and children sometimes ask each other to share part of their goodies with neighbors. Because we have an increasing number of children with allergies to certain foods, we no longer allow sharing of any lunch foods. Children often naturally begin to expand their food interests and preferences from this peer exposure to different foods during meals together. You may thus occasionally receive a note from your child indicating a new food that they have learned about from a friend and may consider including in their own lunch box in the future.

Clothing

Children should have at least one complete change of clothing appropriate for the season in a labeled canvas bag above their cubby. This should include **underwear**, at least 2 pairs of **socks**, a **shirt**, and **pants**. Please check the contents regularly and restock, especially in the winter. We recommend children wear casual clothing that is okay to get dirty because we do many messy activities, and sneakers are the appropriate footwear for school (especially for outside) as dress-up shoes or clogs can be quite dangerous during active play. **Please**

remember to label with names and symbols. Be sure to send jackets, hats, boots, snow-pants, and mittens in the winter as we go outside daily except in severe weather.

Each child will have a cubby space with room for their daily needs including lunch box, nap items, outside clothing. Children often "drop and run" in regards to putting things back in their cubby so labeling whatever stays here helps us locate the correct owner. Also, too many things from home usually make organization and independence difficult. Children gain a sense of independence, and increased self-esteem, when they are able to locate and take care of their own needs, so a workable cubby set up and easy manageable clothing is very important.

Toilet Training

Although we accept children in our program who are not toilet trained in September, the family is responsible for initiating the toilet training of their child during the fall months. Children will be encouraged and supported in their efforts at school and must be well on their way to **underwear by January**. Parents of children still in diapers must provide and keep a supply of disposable diapers and wipes in their cubby. Teachers will notify families, as more are needed. We will work together in helping each child move toward toilet use, and work in partnership with parents to maintain consistency in supporting their child's efforts and progress. In the 4's Room, toilet expectations for children are for developing independence and privacy, with children supported to take care of all of their own bathroom needs as the year progresses, in preparation for going off to Kindergarten.

Personal Toys

We try to help children realize that school may not be the safest place for their most precious toys or other possessions. However, it is often important to a child to bring something from home to show or hold onto. In discussions at school, the children themselves have come up with some guidelines: a toy shouldn't be so small that it "disappears" nor so large that it will not fit into the boot compartment below the cubbies or so special that it cannot be touched. We generally ask children to put a "home toy" away after a short sharing time, unless it is a necessary comfort or lends itself easily to shared use. We do not have a formal Show-and Tell here at First Church, as we try not to encourage a competitive materialistic focus.

In listing good things to bring to school, children included stuffed animals, books, tapes, records, dolls, a nature object, and "things you made yourself". We try to organize our program around the use of specific school equipment rather than toys brought from home, but on the other hand, activities can often grow from the children's ideas and these sometimes involve objects brought into school. Please discourage your child from bringing commercial TV items such as Power Rangers and Barbie Dolls. **Toy guns or any toys that can be used as weapons are not allowed in school.** We also discourage money or a toy that has money in it, as children cannot seem to keep money out of their mouths!

Rest Time

We find that it is very important for all children, even five-year-olds, to have some quiet "down" or rest time to shift focus after a busy, full morning program. All children in the 3's and 4's classrooms who attend the program after 1 PM will have a rest period of at least one hour a day, and may sleep up to two hours as needed. We'll be glad to wake children if sleeping more than one hour is too long. Older children can rest quietly during the first hour and then do quiet activities on their cot if they are not sleeping. Having no rest time is not an option for many reasons. We prefer you not pick up children during naptime, but if necessary, please enter and exit very quietly. Please send a **small** pillow and blanket and stuffed animal if desired (all labeled) in a pillowcase. Cot sheets will be sent home to be laundered. Please be sure to return them with your child on his or her next program day and please inform us of any issues or routines regarding sleep that would be helpful. After-Kindergarten children in the 5's room will also have a rest time of about 20 minutes as they have also had a full and busy day between Darcey School and here.

Birthdays

We usually have a simple birthday celebration for each child in school, unless your child prefers not to do so. Please bring a healthy treat (cupcakes are acceptable and I know convenient) to be served to all the members of your child's class at morning snack time around 10 AM. Special napkins or plates may be included if you wish, but nothing more elaborate as it becomes too cumbersome at school. In order to avoid hurt feelings when planning a home birthday party please follow these suggestions: try to schedule the party on a weekend or at a time that does not involve picking up children from school and **please send invitations by mail if you will not be inviting everyone in the class** in order to have less impact on those children not attending. Who gets to come to birthday parties can be a powerful tool for manipulation and social involvement in the pre-school world, so we emphasize that birthday party invitations are a parent decision.

Medical and Health Care Policies

Upon entrance to the program a current medical and immunization record signed by your pediatrician is required for each child, which must be updated **annually**. If your child's medical form has not been sent in or you need another, please call - **all must be on file and up to date while in attendance at school!** Attendance is not permitted if a current form is not on file.

If your child has any of the following conditions or symptoms you will be called to pick up your child from the Program within one hour of notification. Your child will also be kept separate from the group in order to keep illness from spreading further.

- Colds accompanied by colored nasal discharge
- Uncontrollable productive cough
- Fever greater than 100 F
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Conjunctivitis, (Pink Eye) pinworms, or other infestations
- Strep throat, or mouth sores that are open
- Scabies, head lice, (we have a no nits policy!)
- Unknown body rashes
- Any illness disabling child from child participating fully
- Contagious childhood diseases, such as chicken pox, mumps, or impetigo

In order to return to the program your child must take any prescribed antibiotics and be free from vomiting or diarrhea for a full 24 hours, (home for one day) be free of infestations, be free of open, oozing skin conditions, and **be able to participate comfortably in all program activities including going outside**. It is very important, and in the long run to your advantage, to keep your child home, away from the group when ill, as illnesses otherwise often go around again, becoming re-infected from germs that were spread to the group sometimes because of lowered resistance from not being fully recovered. We are aware of working family demands, but need your cooperation in order to keep illnesses down, especially during the winter, so children and staff can be fully involved within the program.

As a much considered safety policy, we do not administer medication here except for an asthma condition or for severe allergic reactions requiring an epi-pen injection in response to anaphylactic shock symptoms. A release form and proper medical forms must be on file along with the needed medication. This means we are not allowed to give any medications orally or topically to your child while they are at school. At least one teacher at all times is trained in Child & Infant CPR and First Aid, and trained to administer an asthma inhaler or epi-pen injection for medical emergencies.

Child Abuse and Neglect Policy

It is the responsibility of First Church Day Care and Nursery, Inc. (First Church Preschool) as a program, to prevent abuse and neglect of children in our care. Any person paid to care for children in a public or private day care center, which is licensed by the State of Connecticut, is a mandated reporter. This is in order to protect children whose health and welfare may be adversely affected through injury and neglect. Any mandated reporter, who has reasonable cause to suspect or believes that any child under the age of 18 is in danger of being abused or has had non-accidental physical injury inflicted upon him by a person responsible for such child's health, welfare and care **must report** or cause a report to be made and will be fined if they fail to do so. (Per Connecticut Statutes Section 17a-101a) Our procedures follow those outlined in the Connecticut Statutes. They are posted on the parent board and available in detail upon request.

Field Trips

Off-site trips may be planned for a group of children with two or more teachers and parents in the 4's and 5's room but not with the 3's group because of car seat laws. No trips are taken during the first weeks of school. We feel that it is essential children make a secure adjustment to the program and that they feel a part of the group before venturing out for even a short period of time. Children usually begin their experience away from the center with neighborhood walks, and depending on their interest and reaction, more trips for the group may be scheduled further a-field. Trips are planned to enrich the program and curriculum evolves directly from these excursions in dictated stories, drawings, block buildings, dramatic play and discussions. We respect the wishes of children who strongly prefer not to leave the site, and give children a choice of going or remaining at school. Four-year-olds will be transported in teachers' cars in car seats sent from home. Transportation is never easy and we may ask for parent volunteers to help. The Summer Program usually has a number of field trips planned as a regular part of their curriculum and summer experience.

Contributions

We do try to do our part to help maintain a healthy and “green” environment. We welcome donations that may be recycled into art projects as we try to be cognizant of conserving our Earth's resources & reusing materials whenever possible. Items to be recycled include but certainly are not limited to:

- clean paper - computer or otherwise
- spray bottles
- digital photo paper
- squeeze bottles with tops
- cigar boxes
- liquid soap dispensers
- milk crates
- cardboard (especially big boxes)
- envelopes
- anything else that looks interesting & reusable

We also post Wish Lists on the Parent Board from time to time, which will include items we could really use or that others may be done with and wish to contribute. We continue to be collecting, building, and creating as our program takes shape, expands, and grows. We welcome your donations, suggestions and ideas!

Parent Involvement/Fund Raising

Parents are welcome to visit in their child's classroom throughout the year and will be invited for lunch and observation visits at special times, although we do not recommend visits in September as children begin adjusting to their new surroundings, build relationships with staff and manage separation issues. We will provide opportunities to sign up to observe, come for lunch or snack, or contribute to the curriculum, perhaps by helping with cooking or art or science activities. Whenever you would like to visit, please make arrangements with the classroom teacher. Regular communication between home and school is always very important. Communication with parents is an ongoing part of daily life at First Church and happens on many levels and a variety of ways. See page 19.

We schedule a Work Day in the fall and spring where families and staff come together for a special project or cleanup to enhance our program. Scheduled on Saturday, these are fun productive opportunities for getting to know each other and helping the school. The swing set, shed, playhouse, and water-tables, were all built by families in past years, so these projects are really important to us!

There are fund-raising events during the school year to raise money that will go directly to our Program's operation. We try not to burden families with time consuming fundraising activities, but try to find events that are community building and beneficial while requiring minimal volunteer hours. Any special talent, help or involvement you can give will be greatly appreciated. The policy-making body of the program is the Board of Directors and is made up of Church and community members, a staff representative, and parents from the 3's, 4's and 5's groups, serving on our Board of Directors for (two) consecutive years. To achieve this, each year two interested volunteer parents from the 3's and 4's groups are selected to serve on our Board. All parents who wish, may receive copies of Board minutes and are invited to attend meetings held on the third (Wednesday) of each month. A set of our by-laws is available upon request.

Conferences

Teachers would like to have a conference with each parent at least once a year and whenever else it seems necessary. We will try to schedule these shared discussions at a mutually convenient date and time. The first set of conferences will begin in November, after Parent Night, and a schedule will be posted with available times during rest time and at night. An additional spring conference will also be available based on the needs of the child and parents. Children in each classroom are assessed in the fall and again in the spring using the 30 Performance Standards put forth by the State Department of Education for Preschool Curricular Goal & Benchmarks. We use this tool to chart developmental gains that we observe and monitor in the classroom.

Communication

Communication between home and school, - parents and teachers, morning and afternoon staff - is very important for smooth supportive daily life, and sometimes not so easy to accomplish. We have set up procedures and try to create opportunities for effective communication as we see the need. Please be aware of the following:

- **Each child must be signed in with time arriving and departing, at the center table each day. This is a State regulation.**
- Each family also has a labeled "Parent Pocket" on the wall outside their child's classroom. We will leave injury notes, daily concerns, forms, newsletters, etc. there. These should be checked daily so important information is not overlooked or forgotten.
- An Injury Log is also present at the center table in which teachers record all significant bumps, bruises, and injuries. You will also receive a "Boo Boo Note" in your Parent Pocket so you will know what has occurred and if it needs any further attention.
- Written notes with specific information pertinent to that day such as changes in pickup time or person, lunch concerns, no breakfast eaten, etc. must be given to your child's Head Teacher who will then post it in the designated area. This helps staff remember the many specifics for each child, making them able to better meet individual needs.
- Outside of each classroom "Weekly Curriculum Plans" are posted, indicating the curriculum focus, activities, and goals for that week. There is also a whiteboard on which activities and goings on for each day are written. Be sure to check it to keep up with what is happening in your child's classroom. In addition, we have an Afternoon Program board with daily nap schedules listed for each child and afternoon activities for each week so you can be informed about all that goes on here!
- A monthly newsletter is also written with relevant information about that month's concerns, needs, events, etc. and is placed in each Parent Pocket. Please read it carefully and respond as needed. A copy should also be up on the Parent Board.
- Outside the office door there is a Parent Bulletin Board that will display such things as Snack Menus, Parent Representatives and Board of Director notes, the monthly

newsletter, available resources or information sheets, news of interest, etc. Please check it regularly, it is there for you!

- A Parent Resource Area is located to the right of the entrance door as you come in. Feel free to take copies of informative articles or pamphlets that are there periodically, and to share any resources you have discovered that may be of interest or help to other parents.
- Again, it is very important that a parent call to inform us of absences and any **transportation changes in the Kindergarten bus drop off schedule** so we can keep track of each child's daily whereabouts and not panic if a child is not present as scheduled!

Grievance Procedure

Any problem or complaint should be brought to the attention of the classroom Head teacher for discussion. If the issue continues to be unresolved, the parent may bring it to the Director who will work with the parent and teacher to find a workable solution. If the situation requires further resolution, a parent may make a written appeal to the Board of Directors with a copy to the Director. The Board will consider the matter as soon as possible, and it will be kept confidential. The Board of Directors will then notify the parent in writing of its response to the grievance.

SUMMER PROGRAM

The Summer Program is essentially a separate program from the 10-month school year session, with separate staffing and enrollment contracts. It will follow the same general philosophy and guidelines of our First Church Program with support for social interactions and learning in a child centered play experience. The Summer Program will be housed in the "Four's Room" during the hottest hours of the day with fans and the natural coolness of the lower level. Staff will structure the program with outside activities and games as well as summer cooking, art, and science experiences to keep children cool, busy, and happy. Much of the time will be spent outside in the playground and backyard area, using sprinklers and bathing suits, and many water play activities to keep cool. While the program will basically be on site with children exploring their natural environment and creating a program around their own interests and needs, additional curriculum may be created around scheduled field trips, as long as we can arrange appropriate transportation in teacher's cars. The Summer Program will have more of a "camp" feel as compared to our normal school year program.

Enrollment requirements include a minimum of 2 mornings per week, and 2 weeks in the program. Familiar school-year teachers usually staff the Summer Program and when needed, some new summer program staff are also available. **Children who were enrolled in the Kindergarten group are not eligible for the Summer Program that follows their Kindergarten year**, (except for the first week if public school is extended) as we feel they have outgrown us both physically and socially, and are ready for new experiences. From past experience we find that young three year olds do best by entering the pre-school in the slower

paced, more protective environment of the 3's room in September and are generally not comfortable entering Summer Program until after their 3's room year.