PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

Pre-kindergarten is recognized as part of a comprehensive Pre-K through twelfth grade educational program for students in Glen Ridge. The Pre-K children are part of the tradition of excellence in our Glen Ridge public school system. We recognize that growth and development are unique to each child and that children develop skills at different rates, especially in the areas of emergent literacy and mathematics. At no other time in a child’s educational experience does such a wide range of needs, abilities, aptitudes, and interests exist; need to be effectively dealt with in a classroom setting; and fall within such a wide realm of what is developmentally “normal.” Prekindergarten is recognized as the first year of formal schooling in Glen Ridge.

The philosophy of the Glen Ridge Pre-kindergarten is based on the understanding that the early years are crucial to subsequent educational programs. We recognize that the rate of learning and development during these years maximizes each child’s potential; therefore, the learning environment builds upon the opportunity that is inherent in the enthusiasm, openness and readiness of children to absorb new experiences during their formative years.

Our fundamental goal is to provide a planned educational environment, rich in learning experiences, so that a positive foundation for the future will be nurtured. We are dedicated to providing those learning experiences that will develop a positive self-image in every child along with the emotional, social, and intellectual skills necessary to be successful in the classroom. Prekindergarten develops an awareness and readiness for school with exposure to many different basic concepts such as counting, colors, shapes, patterning, math, rhymes, sequencing, and environmental print. Learning centers are primarily based on a “letter of the week” and are designed to develop the whole child. Children take the initiative to choose such activities as blocks, puzzles, easel, painting, computers, housekeeping, listening center, writing center, light table, and sensory centers. Imaginative play is coupled with teacher-directed activities during circle or rectangle time, small group, or individualized instruction.

The Glen Ridge curriculum guides include district curriculum goals for grades prekindergarten through twelfth, an acknowledgement of the importance of pre-kindergarten. The Pre-K educational and developmental program is therefore fully coordinated with the Glen Ridge kindergarten and primary grades’ curriculum. Kindergarten teachers are able to rely on students coming well prepared for the expectations of our all-day kindergarten program.
Articulation between Pre-K and K staff is extremely worthwhile to help meet the needs of our individual learners. The frequent communication between the grade level teachers about the individual strengths and weaknesses for each child is extremely valuable.

Generally, the activities in this curriculum are designed to:

- Teach children, recognizing that growth and development are unique to each child and that children develop skills at different rates especially in the areas of emergent literacy and mathematics;
- Motivate children to learn;
- Identify the individual needs of the child;
- Develop a positive and realistic self-image;
- Develop positive relationships with peers and adults;
- Encourage the child to express himself/herself creatively;
- Develop language through listening, speaking, and dramatic play activities;
- Develop maximum physical growth through gross and fine motor activities;
- Provide experiences to stimulate and develop cognitive skills.

The Pre-kindergarten program is comprised of two different options: 8:20 am – 12:00 pm; and 8:20 am – 2:30 pm.

The 8:20 am-12:00 program provides the traditional Glen Ridge Pre-kindergarten experience enhancing the development of the whole child in the academic, physical, emotional, and social domains. A large group Morning Meeting will be followed by opportunities for small group learning and hands-on center activities encompassing the New Jersey Preschool Standards and the Glen Ridge Pre-K curricular guidelines in Language Arts/Literacy, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. Students have the opportunity for socialization, lunch, and other activities to enhance the morning program.

At 12:00 pm, this group of students leaves for the day. Remaining students have the opportunity for a rest or quiet activity time followed by opportunities for additional center activities designed to enhance and enrich the core program. Opportunities will also be available for free play, socialization, and additional outdoor time. We are hoping to be able to provide full-day students with some opportunities to interact with related arts teachers as well. A teacher and an aide will be available to provide these exciting educational experiences.

Pre-kindergarten creates a firm foundation in the development of independent learners. Both teacher-directed and choice-based activities help to create independent learners; an important goal not only of our Pre-kindergarten program, but a reflection of our district mission statement and strategic plan as well. We stress thinking and reasoning skills and help our children to become good problem solvers. We prepare the children for elementary school, help them develop confidence in themselves as learners, and prepare them for our academically-
oriented all-day Kindergarten program. Children begin to learn the expected behaviors, both social and academic, that are a vital part of our Glen Ridge Schools.

Pre-kindergarten provides a transitional experience from the world of private nursery schools to the public school system. It is taught by our highly qualified, state certified staff and supported by aides who are certified as teachers or substitute teachers. Our children’s academic, social, and emotional needs are met as they transition from the plethora of early childhood educational approaches embraced by local nursery schools (Reggio-Emilia, Montessori, etc.)

Comprehensive and extensive research in the field of early childhood education recognizes: “Children who enter pre-kindergarten, as compared with peers who do not, are less apt to enter special education or be held back, while performing better in school…” (Maeroff, 2006). There are also many studies documenting fewer students requiring remedial services in later years.

The Glen Ridge Pre-kindergarten program and school Pre-kindergarten through second grade configuration are held in high esteem both in the State of N.J. and nationally as part of the national PreK- 3 movement. We are very positively recognized in Columbia University professor Gene Maeroff’s book Building Blocks: Making Children Successful in the Early Years of School.

After a year in our Pre-K program, our children should know and be able to accomplish these skills for a successful beginning of Kindergarten.

**Language Skills**
- Knows and spells first name
- Orally says first and last name and recognizes letters in name
- Gives street address and phone number
- Knows birthday (month and day)
- Follows 2-3 step directions
- Identifies and names shapes: circle, square, rectangle, triangle and oval
- Identifies and names colors: red, yellow, blue, orange, green, purple, black and white
- Identifies likes and differences in pictures
- Names pictures of familiar objects: boy, girl, tree, ball, leaf, car, cat, dog, key, cup, apple, flower, etc.
- Identifies body parts: head, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, elbows, legs, feet, chin, shoulders, fingers, etc.
- Answers questions
- Listens to stories with interest (for approximately 10-15 minutes)
- Listens without interrupting
- Uses words to express feelings
- Rhymes words
● Tells a story about a past event
● Shows interest in books—pretends to read
● Recognizes environmental print (Ex: Dunkin Donuts, Goldfish and Ritz crackers, Cheerios, etc.)
● Says and recognizes the letters of the alphabet
● Speaks with complete sentences (Baby talk is for imaginative play, not for communicating.)

**Fine Motor Skills**
- Grasps/holds pencil with fingers
- Writes first name
- Draws a circle and square without help
- Prints numbers 1-10
- Glues and pastes
- Cuts with (safety) scissors
- Folds paper in half
- Buttons, snaps and zips
- Puts on own coat

**Cognitive Skills**
- Counts objects to 10
- Sorts objects by size, color, shape
- Retells a story
- Does puzzles of 15 or more pieces
- Understands directional concepts—in, out, on, off
- Completes a pattern of two colors
- Draws a person with six parts or more: head, nose, eyes, mouth, body, arms, legs, feet, fingers, etc.
- Sequences 3 or more pictures to tell a story

**Gross Motor Skills**
- Plays in a group
- Stacks at least 10 blocks
- Gallops, skips, runs, jumps, hops, dances or moves to music
- Catches, kicks, bounces a ball
- Walks up and down stairs using alternating feet
- Enjoys different sports
- Rides a tricycle
- Stands on one foot for five seconds
- Hops on one foot
- Walks forward heel-to-toe
Walks backwards toe-to-heel

Social/Emotional Skills
- Controls emotions—states his/her feelings, not acts them out
- Enjoys playing with other children and being a part of a group
- Separates readily from mother without a fuss (Five minutes of fussing is okay, more that that is not.)
- Shares and takes turns

The Pre-kindergarten program is part of a national thrust for universal Pre-K. Glen Ridge has always been proud to be a leader in educational endeavors. Research indicates quality early education improves school outcomes for all students. Strong communities understand that investing in children early ensures that they have every opportunity to be successful throughout their lives!