

## **Curriculum Framework**

### **Philosophy of Early Childhood Education**

Learning takes place as a child interacts with his/her world and becomes part of the action. He/she explores the world through his/her senses, through curiosity and through discovery. The traditional "sit still and do as you are told" practice takes all the fun out of learning. Children gain satisfaction from solving problems, finding out, testing, and achieving.

Play is the business of children. Our program agrees with Piaget's theory that children must construct their own learning. When a child builds with blocks, explores his environment with all his senses, creates with art materials, listens to stories and communicates ideas and feelings, the child is working and learning. Children's growth and development are enhanced through play and hands-on interactive sensory experiences within the environment.

The Academy for Little Children strongly supports the full development of children through rich, research-based, and developmentally appropriate curriculum. Our dedication to the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) is evident throughout every step of the curriculum process. Teachers use the RIELDS to craft age appropriate and engaging lessons and activities. Our RIELDS-trained staff use their education and experience to shape the content, context, and process of each activity or experience. They act as facilitators to allow children to be active learners instead of passive listeners. On their planning forms, the teachers note each RIELDS objective an activity is designed to meet. Therefore, all teachers, teacher assistants, and substitutes are able to execute the lesson in the designed manner. We believe that teaching should be intentional. During the activity or lesson, the teacher documents children's knowledge, development, and growth. This documentation is then uploaded to Teaching Strategies GOLD, our online assessment system, and will be used to inform future planning. It is also used to share information with families and develop plans for children who need extra support, screening, or services. The Academy adheres to NAEYC's definition of curriculum, and intentionally and consistently embeds best practice into curriculum planning and implementation. The nine domains of the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards are integrated into the foundational base of practice, as is the Creative Curriculum for Children. Teaching Strategies GOLD is user-friendly and inclusive, and enables the teachers to increase the effectiveness of their assessments while having more time to spend with children.

Our teachers strive to create a positive classroom climate. Throughout the day our teachers facilitate, model, observe, play, and scaffold with the children. Vygotsky's theories of teacher and peer interactions as being effective ways of developing skills and strategies in children are utilized by our program. Teachers plan and provide individual, small, and large group experiences that are of interest to the children and build on their prior knowledge in order to meet their individual needs.

Creating classrooms that are nurturing, stimulating, and that have a positive climate is important to our center. Each learning environment is specifically designed and contains developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant materials according to the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (preschool). Ensuring the health and safety of all children is a priority in each classroom's arrangement. Our teachers follow a predictable daily schedule in order to provide structure and

# Academy for Little Children

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consistency for the children. Time for outdoor gross motor experiences on our carefully designed playgrounds are planned and included daily in our schedules for our students.

We believe in the philosophy of I AM - I CAN. There are no limits to the heights our children can reach when given positive reinforcement and an abundance of love. We believe that with proper guidance, support and working as a team with our families that children will reach their highest potential. We are ensuring the growth of our future.

The Academy for Little Children is welcoming of families and children of all abilities. Often in early childhood, disabilities and/or developmental delays may become evident. The Academy works with families to help each child receive supports and/or services that may be needed. For children under the age of three, this may involve working closely with the family and Early Intervention to develop an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). For children three years of age and older, we collaborate with the family, Child Outreach, and the corresponding school district to request an evaluation and/or services. Research has proven that the earlier a delay is noticed and treated, the better the outcomes are for that child's academic and social success.

We welcome children with mild, moderate, and severe special health or educational needs, provided that appropriate accommodations can be put in place. Our goal is that we best meet the needs of our enrolled children. We do this in the following ways:

- Families of children who have special health care needs will be asked to complete a Special Care Plan and Emergency Form for Children with Special Needs. The Academy for Little Children will go over the plans in consultation with the family pediatrician/ specialist and assist Academy staff in gaining necessary training for the specific health needs of individual children. Adaptations/ modifications will be made as necessary to meet the needs of the child.
- The Academy for Little Children will accept children's IEP's provided the child's needs can be met. Families must provide a copy of their child's IEP. Teachers will read and make necessary changes to the environment and planning modifications per the IEP.
- Academy staff will seek family permission to work in collaboration with agencies and professionals supporting any child with special education needs including partaking in IEP meetings.
- Academy staff will collaborate with parents in supporting any child with special education needs.

Academy for Little Children currently works with various school districts in servicing local children, including West Warwick, Warwick, Cumberland, and more.

The Academy for Little Children firmly believes that a child's family serves as his/her first and greatest teachers. We stress the importance of a home-school connection in several ways: interviews, tours, an open door policy, family-teacher conferences, a Family Advisory Board, classroom and school-wide functions at various times of the day, to name a few. We survey families bi-annually to get objective, anonymous feedback that is used to make improvements to our school and practices. Our policies are researched-based and always in the best interests of the children. We work with families to create a continuity of care between home and school. In addition, we solicit cultural and other information about our families in order to make each family feel at home and for each child's beliefs and culture to be represented and appreciated.

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We at the Academy consider our teachers to be our most valuable resource. As a result, we work diligently to keep them apprised of the new developments in the field. We hold staff meetings and trainings. We encourage them to participate in off-site trainings and classes that pertain to their professional goals. We conduct regular observations and provide feedback that allows them to strengthen their practice and be the best teachers possible. We welcome volunteers in our program as well, making sure to follow state regulations when doing so. Volunteers in the form of family members and college students benefit our classrooms greatly by offering our students experiences and conversations they might not have been exposed to otherwise.

Within a child's time at the Academy, they will have many experiences aligned with the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards as well as Creative Curriculum. These experiences will engage children in many activities throughout each part of the day. We believe in a Responsive Care curriculum throughout all the classrooms from Infants to Pre-Kindergarten as each child is treated as a unique individual with needs of his/her own. Through observations, authentic assessments and differentiated teaching methods, our children guide our curriculum, schedules, materials, and classroom learning environments by their interests, cultures and ability levels. Each child will always be encouraged to achieve, learn and grow at his/her own pace. As individuals, all children enrolled at the Academy will be accommodated to the best of our ability whether they have a physical disability, developmental delay, social integration needs or a sensory processing disorder. The teachers will make every effort along with the Director and Education Coordinator to collaborate with families, Early Intervention, Child Outreach, and other community resources a child may need to succeed. There is a consistent outreach and partnership with families through daily communication, weekly emails, social media closed group connection on Facebook for only Academy families and staff, monthly newsletters, conferences, our open door policy and various school wide events. We believe strongly in the home/school connection as we strive to work with families to give their children the best experiences and care throughout the most influential developmental years.

In order to provide care of the highest quality, the Academy supports individual learning goals and learning styles, including those of English language learners and children with developmental disabilities and delays. Learning goals are developed by the classroom teacher, families, and relevant specialists. For example, a toddler teacher might notice that a 2 ½ year old student's diaper is usually dry and she uses the toilet frequently. That teacher would speak with the child's parents and recommend they start potty-training and sending the child in with underwear and a supply of extra clothing. If the parent agrees the child is ready, both the teacher and parents start actively potty-training the child. The child might need to be taken to the bathroom every 10-15 minutes initially and then the length of time between bathroom trips would be incrementally increased. Communication and positivity are essential to making potty-training successful and encouraging for the child.

A parent of a preschooler may bring up a concern about his child's disinterest in drawing and writing. The child's teacher could then brainstorm ideas of how to engage the child throughout the day in this area. If the child likes to play with blocks, the teacher could incorporate maps, road signs, and books into the center. During a small group math game, the teacher could have the children draw the number of dots on the dice after rolling them. Upon entering the classroom in the morning, there could be a sign in chart or book for each child to write or trace the letters in his/her name. As evidenced, there are several ways to support a child's individual learning goal.

Like adults, children learn in different ways. While we believe that children learn best through play, we are cognizant of children's learning styles. Teachers at the Academy believe in Howard Gardner's theory of

Multiple Intelligences and know that not all children can learn the same information in the same way. This will be explained in detail later in the framework. Similarly, children who are learning English as a second language and children with delays and/or disabilities have specific needs that must be recognized and met in order to provide them with a quality education.

## **RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS**

Our curriculum is directly aligned to the RIELDS and we use parts of Creative Curriculum to supplement teacher ideas and children's interests. We acknowledge the four essential parts of a quality curriculum: context, content, teaching and facilitating, and process.

### **Context (Materials, Learning Environments, Routines & Schedules)**

ALC teachers create warm, safe and welcoming learning environments where children are able to actively explore and discover their surroundings. We view families as members of the educational process.

### **Overall Program Schedule**

In all classrooms, transition times are part of the day and are built into the schedule. From Early Toddlers to Pre-Kindergarten, the children have set mealtimes of AM Snack, PM Snack and Lunch times, as well as two set times to go outside or have indoor movement time. Music and Movement times are allowed for in all rooms. Outside times are used as an extension of the classroom learning environment. Teachers intentionally plan gross motor and cross-curricular activities for large and small groups during outdoor play times. All schedules allow for flexibility and continued responsive care for all children.

### **Overall Program Schedule Sample**

**6:30 Center Opens/** Children Arrive and have access to a table where they can have breakfast if needed/All centers are available for Free Choice

\*Hands are washed before and after AM Snack, Bathroom Break or Diaper Changes

\*Music and Movement time (children can dance to music, dance with colored scarves or play with instruments)

\*Morning Meeting or Circle Time (Introduction to the Day, Songs, Stories, Games) (depending on classroom, 5-15 minutes)

\*Planned Activities (activities and materials are intentionally planned and aligned with the RI Early Learning and Development Standards) During this time there are opportunities for one on one time, small group activities, and independent/individual exploration. (1 hour)

\*A.M. Outside/Indoor Gross Motor (independent exploration, large & small group games) (45min-1hr)

\*Hands are washed before and after Lunch time, Bathroom Break or Diaper Changes

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\*Lunch time (as children move through the classrooms, they are given more independence from self-feeding and cleaning up to getting lunch boxes and opening snacks.)

\*Quiet Time (All classrooms provide a quiet time where calming music is played. Children are not required to sleep but they are asked to and encouraged to be respectful of the children around them who need their rest. Those children that do not sleep or wake up early will be able to look at books or do quiet activities.) Cots are placed 3 feet apart during quiet time and parents are encouraged to send in a crib sheet and blanket to make the cot comfortable. (The Academy has a supply of sheets and blankets for children who do not have them.)

\*P.M. Activities (continuation of planned activities are offered, all centers are available for play & exploration)

\*P.M. Outside/Indoor Gross Motor (independent exploration, large & small group games) (45min-1hr)

\*Free Center Choice Time (Manipulatives, Library, Coloring, Cozy Corner)

## **6:00 Center Closes**

\*Free Center Choice times take place for 1-2 hours in the morning and the afternoon.

## **Materials**

All classrooms have access to specific cabinets where materials are kept for rotation. Materials are rotated every 2-3 weeks according to child interest and use. Materials are organized by classroom age group and labeled with picture and words. The shelves in each classroom are at child level and are labeled so materials are accessible to all children for independent use. Only covers/lids that can be easily removed by the children are used on the accessible materials. Materials and supplies that are put out for child use are organized and maintained. Dramatic play toys belong in the dramatic play area. Manipulatives belong on the manipulative shelves. Blocks belong in the block area, along with block toys. Teachers work with the children on keeping the centers organized so materials are easy to find and orderly. It is important for teachers to remember the needs of all students when setting up the classroom. Children with disabilities also need to have access to materials. A child with a wheelchair may need wider spaces between tables and shelves in order to negotiate the space.

Materials are chosen for each classroom to support the cultures of our children and families. At the Academy we believe in celebrating the customs of all of our children and to help each family feel like part of the school community. We have multicultural posters in each classroom but also display photographs of each child and family to make the displays more meaningful to the children. The materials reflect the diversity found in our society too, including dolls and figurines of different ages, genders, races, and abilities (people using wheelchairs and canes, etc.). Music CD's and classroom songs reflect different languages as well.

We believe classroom materials should provide challenging opportunities to take a child to the next learning level, promote positive social interactions, accommodate all children's developmental and ability levels within the classroom, be available for independent use and self-correction skill building, and to support discovery, exploration, language development, motor skills, cognitive and persistence skills. Offering children various materials to work on a skill provides them with numerous opportunities for learning. For example, materials that promote fine motor development include small building toys such as Legos, art materials such as markers and scissors, puzzles of varying difficulty, and manipulatives such as lacing beads or cards. Fine motor skills can be developed in every area of the classroom if the classroom has the proper set up and materials/supplies

accessible to the children. Having materials of varying difficulty can benefit children with delays or disabilities because they can start using the type that is easiest for them and then slowly challenge their skill levels. For example, a child might find a puzzle with knobs to be easiest to manipulate. Once the child masters that skill, he/she would move on to a simple puzzle without knobs, then to a simple interlocking puzzle, and then finally to a complex puzzle. Additionally, some children may have difficulty with small puzzle pieces and would benefit from large floor puzzles.

Teachers select and utilize materials that encourage exploration, experimentation, and discovery. Children do not need to be told what to do by teachers. For example, a teacher who wants to the children to explore color-mixing might put out white paper, various paintbrushes and rollers, and the primary colors. Color wands might be added to the science center. Beakers of water, medicine droppers, and food coloring could be provided in the sensory table. If teachers provide the experience, children will explore. The teacher's job is to facilitate and challenge the students' thinking skills.

## **Room Arrangement**

Each classroom layout is guided by the ITERS (Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale) (Infants-Middle Toddlers) or ECERS (Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale) (Older Toddlers-Pre-Kindergarten) as well as DCYF licensing regulations.

Each classroom environment is organized into learning centers such as Dramatic Play, Science, Math, Creative Arts, Library, Cozy Corner, Listening Center, Sand/Water Table, Building Area, Writing Area, Fine Motor Area. Books are available throughout the classroom and are located within each learning center.

## **Classroom Schedules, Materials and Room Arrangement Specifics by Classroom**

All classrooms from Early Toddlers to Pre-Kindergarten have structured/visible learning centers. All centers and materials are labeled, organized and accessible at all times.

In the Older Toddler, Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten rooms, writing materials are accessible to all children at all times.

The rooms are arranged in order to give children space where one child is able to have some alone time and self-exploration, while other areas allow up to four children to be engaged in play with peers. Quiet spaces such as library, cozy corner and listening center are as far away from Building Area and Dramatic Play as allowed by room space.

Within each classroom, pictures of the children and families, as well as children's artwork are displayed.

### ***Infants (6 weeks-12 months) ITERS***

#### **Schedule**

Schedules for younger infants are individualized and created together by the families and teacher. The schedule is responsive to the needs of the children for feedings, diaper changes, naps, tummy time, gross motor play and other planned activities. Infants are also able to venture outside for some fresh air daily.

## **Materials/ Room Arrangement**

The Infant room layout supports children who are mobile and non-mobile, who need to be fed and who are learning to self-feed. Teachers who feed bottles to a child will sit in a rocking chair and engage in conversation while feeding as well as interacting with other children in their care. There are jumpers for those children working on strengthening their legs muscles. Push toys are available for those who need assistance standing and taking steps. Each child has his/her own crib for nap times. Infants have access to soft, cozy toys to grasp, hold and manipulate.

### ***Early Toddlers (12-18months) ITERS***

#### **Schedule**

Older Infants or Early Toddlers, have schedule guidelines with planned meal times (AM Snack, PM Snack and Lunch) and outside times twice a day. Their day is still responsive to their needs with some planned “structured” activities in place such as a small group story for those interested. Informal story times occur throughout the day as well.

#### **Materials/Room Arrangement**

Children in this classroom are able to begin exploring centers. The learning centers and materials that are explored each day are library, cozy corner, dramatic play, building area, gross motor cushions for climbing and stacking, science/sensory materials for discovery and exploration, math manipulatives for fine motor strengthening, and creative arts.

### ***Middle Toddlers (18 months-2 years) ITERS***

#### **Schedule**

In the Middle Toddler room, the schedule adds a bit more “structure” as games and songs are introduced during a planned whole group meeting time for those interested in participating.

#### **Materials/Room Arrangement**

In this classroom learning centers include a Sand Table, Dramatic Play, Building Area, Library, Cozy Corner, Math Manipulatives, and Science/Sensory exploration.

### ***Older Toddlers and Early Preschool (2 – 3 years) ITERS or ECERS depending on average group age at the time***

#### **Schedule**

In Older Toddlers and the Early Preschool room, the structure is in place to act as a preparation for Preschool with a more predictable daily routine. There is a planned Morning Meeting for discussions, songs, games and stories. Children are given opportunities for Free Center Choice times and Planned Activity Time.

## **Materials/Room Arrangement**

In Older Toddlers, the learning environment includes a Writing Area, Building Area, Dramatic Play, Science, Cozy Corner, Library, Sand Table, and Math manipulatives.

### ***Preschool (3-4 years) ECERS***

#### **Schedule**

The Preschool schedule continues to add more structure to the day. The children continue to have planned meal times and outside times. When unable to go outside due to severe weather conditions, the children have the opportunity to participate in indoor gross motor activities such as games and obstacle courses. There is a set Morning Meeting and whole group story time in the morning as well as a small end of the day wrap up group time.

## **Materials/Room Arrangement**

In Preschool, the learning environment includes a Writing Area, Building Area, Dramatic Play, Science, Cozy Corner, Library, Sand and Water Tables, Art Area and Math manipulatives. Writing materials are accessible to all children at all times.

### ***Pre-Kindergarten (4-5 years) ECERS***

#### **Schedule**

In the Pre-Kindergarten room, the schedule is predictable and structured in regards to getting ready for Kindergarten. The schedule allows for Morning Meeting which runs ~15-20 minutes or depending on child engagement. It also allows for Free Center Choice times, Planned Activity Times, Outside and Indoor Gross Motor Activities, and story times for small group, one on one and the whole group.

## **Materials/Room Arrangement**

Writing materials are available throughout the day and are kept in a central location so it is accessible to children in all learning centers. In Pre-K, the learning environment includes a Writing Area, Listening Area, Fine Motor Area, Building Area, Dramatic Play, Science, Cozy Corner, Library, Sand Table, Creative Arts Area and Math Table.

## **Content (What Children Know, Understand and Are Able To Do)**

Teachers utilize an assessment plan that informs curriculum planning. This framework guides all teachers to align their classroom curriculum to the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards. There are 9 domains and 39 learning goals within the RIELDS. We believe that children use PLAY as a vehicle to drive their learning experiences and enhance their skills.

The following are some examples of how each developmental domain is handled in the classrooms.

### **Physical Health and Motor Development**

#### Health and Safety

- \*Children grow to understand safety rules and consequences
- \*From Infants to Pre-Kindergarten, children are encouraged to enhance and strengthen their self-care skills.

#### Infants - Middle Toddlers (6 weeks- 2 years)

Throughout these classrooms children are:

- \*lifting their head to rolling over during tummy time
- \*pulling themselves up to taking steps independently
- \*grasping their bottle to self feeding finger foods

#### Older Toddlers – Pre-Kindergarten (2 years-5 years)

Throughout these classrooms children are:

- \*potty training (pulling up and down pants/ pull ups/underwear)
- \*putting on/taking off and zippering jackets
- \*independently toileting, dressing and hand washing
- \*taking care of personal belongings

#### Gross Motor

- \* Children strengthen and learn how to control their large muscles while running, jumping and climbing demonstrating balance and coordination.

#### Fine Motor

- \* Children work on strengthening and controlling their small muscles through grasping objects, play dough play, stringing beads, using tweezers and eye droppers, and tearing paper while developing the skills needed to grasp a pencil and hold a scissor for writing and cutting.

### **Social and Emotional Development**

- \* Throughout each classroom children are learning to form bonds with teachers and other children.

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- \* From Infants to Pre-Kindergarten, children are building a sense of trust and belonging within their family, the program and community.
- \* Play aids in children developing skills for entering into cooperative play, learning to help and empathize with others and creating friendships.
- \* Children begin gaining a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work efforts.
- \* Children develop an awareness of their thoughts, feelings and opinions.
- \* Children begin to develop methods to self-regulate their behavior and emotions within various situations.
- \* Children begin to develop the ability to solve conflict problems with peers as well as with their choices.

## **Language Development**

- \* Children begin developing expressive language skills in order to express feelings, thoughts, needs and ideas.
- \* Children begin developing receptive language in order to understand and follow multi-step directions.
- \* Children develop listening skills, build upon current vocabulary, learn to problem solve using language and engage in back and forth conversations with peers and adults.
- \*\* Children who are English Language Learners are encouraged in the skills of listening to, understanding, responding to and expressing their thoughts, ideas and needs in English. We also understand the importance of supporting the child's development of his/her native language, and encourage families to assist us in bringing that knowledge into the classroom and school.

## **Literacy**

- \* Children gain an understanding that print has a message.
- \* Children use scribbles, linear lines, shapes, letter-like symbols and letters to convey a message.
- \* Children learn the letters in their name and name writing skills
- \* Children begin demonstrating alphabet knowledge such as letter recognition and identification and letter sounds.
- \* Children are encouraged to retell and reenact events from familiar stories through words, actions and/or pictures.
- \* Children are introduced to parts of a book throughout each classroom, from flipping the pages and looking at and discussing the pictures to the concepts of title, author, setting and reading pre-primer sight words.

## **Cognitive Development**

- \* Children engage in play as a way to develop their own approaches to learning
- \* Throughout each classroom, children gain the persistence skills necessary to learn how to invest time within an activity despite interruptions and distractions.
- \* Children are encouraged to use logic and reasoning skills to apply previous knowledge to new skills.
- \* Children develop the ability to demonstrate cognitive flexibility by adjusting behaviors to new contexts and situations.
- \* Throughout all the classrooms but especially Older Toddlers through Pre-Kindergarten, Children are continuously encouraged to "make a plan" by establishing goals and following through.

## **Math**

- \*Teachers use a variety of mathematical language to enhance each child's logic and reasoning skills using terms such as "more," "less," "equal," "how many," "compare," "contrast," "length," "width," "inches," etc..
- \*Children are encouraged to group, sort, and compare according to size, shape, and various attributes within large group times, small groups and independent practice.
- \*Children are encouraged to use various objects such as rulers, measuring tape, blocks, counting bears, Legos and more to explore the concept of measurement. Children learn to use standard and non-standard units of measurement.
- \*Children have the ability to demonstrate knowledge of one to one correspondence through graphing, counting, and sorting.
- \*Children are encouraged to practice matching number symbols to objects to enhance their number/object association skills within large groups, small groups and independent practice.
- \*Children have the opportunities to explore patterning concepts using Legos, colored blocks, and other manipulatives.
- \*Children have opportunities to explore various shapes within puzzles, the classroom environment, and outdoors.

## **Science**

- \*Children have access to exploration tools and materials such as magnifying glasses, magnets, natural objects (rocks, shells, etc.) to explore.
- \*Children have many opportunities to predict, experiment, observe and record data. We observe living creatures, plants, flowers, natural objects, and more. Children also use the scientific method (predicting, experimenting, & recording information) to explore concepts such as sinking/floating, melting, mixing, dissolving, and absorbing.
- \*Children have many opportunities to explore and observe the cause and effect concept and develop scientific methods to learn about their world.

## **Social Studies**

- \*Children develop a beginning understanding of various cultures and cultural diversity through books displayed or read aloud, dramatic play costumes and items, block area people of different cultures and abilities. Differences between children and families are discussed and celebrated to create a classroom of accepting and kind children and teachers.
- \*Children begin acknowledging their role in and belonging to their family, school and community.
- \*Children begin to develop an understanding of fairness, responsibility, and social roles.
- \*Children in Preschool and Pre-K have opportunities to gain insight on places, locations and environments within the world while exploring a map, stories and experiences.
- \*Children gain beginning understanding of time (past, present, future; yesterday, today and tomorrow), place (location) and change (environment, weather).

## **Creative Arts**

- \*All classrooms use open-ended, process based creative art activities to support individual interpretation and expression.

- \*Children have many opportunities to explore and create various methods and tools for creating 2D and 3D pieces of art.
- \*Children have access to construction paper, glue, scissors, crayons, markers, colored pencils, tissue paper, stencils, paint, paint brushes, chalk and collage materials at all times.
- \*Play dough is made weekly for molding, building, sensory, fine motor and exploration.
- \*Music and Movement is offered daily in all classrooms.
- \*Children are provided with musical instruments and colored scarves that are accessible at all times daily.
- \*Dramatic Play areas are equipped with 2 functioning themes (for example house and ice cream shop or laundromat and kitchen)

## **Process (How Children Learn)**

Our curriculum foundation is based on research and theory, which in turn informs our implementation of the Early Learning & Development Standards along with Creative Curriculum. We focus on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory as children learn and develop in their own way, at their own pace, according to their ability level. Various learning styles include visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and logical-mathematical. Providing children with different ways to learn a concept or skill increases their chances for success. Our belief is that children learn best through play based, hands-on experiences as play is an essential tool for language development, social-emotional development, self-regulation and cognitive development. Each classroom schedule gives a substantial portion of the day for free child-centered choice for at least 90 minutes along with another 60 minutes of planned small group and independent activities offered in the morning and 60-90 minutes of free child-center choice in the afternoon giving children the opportunity to fully engage in play. PLAY is supported by all Academy teachers as a basis for learning. We value children's exploration and gain insight on each child's interests, interest level, abilities, social interactions, language development through peer conversations and adult/child conversations using feedback loops.

At the Academy, our teachers facilitate, nurture, observe, co-play, model and question throughout the day. Based on Lev Vygotsky's theory on Proximal Development, interactions between teacher and child can help that child scaffold learning, thereby developing new concepts and building upon those already mastered. Another influential theorist is John Dewey as we advocate for our children to become problem solvers through active thinking rather than rote memorization. His belief that the most important learning comes as a result of interactions with others and the world at large is beneficial to our intentional teaching practices as we actively engage with each child as well as encourage appropriate interactions with peers to form relationships. Play paves the way for children to learn more about themselves and others around them.

### **Infants (6weeks-12 months)**

### **Early Toddlers (12-18months)**

### **Middle Toddlers (18 months-2 years)**

Within these classrooms, the main focus is that children are discovering the world through responsive care relationships and a variety of play based, hands-on opportunities.

### **Older Toddlers (2 – 3 years)**

### **Preschool (3-4 years)**

### **Pre-Kindergarten (4-5 years)**

Within these classrooms, the main focus is that children learn through meaningful, intentional opportunities created through learning styles, interest and ability levels.

## **Teaching and Facilitating (Teacher's Role, Relationships & Intentional Teaching)**

At the program level for this curriculum framework, teachers are strongly encouraged to use Universal Design and Differentiated Instruction as methods for classroom curriculum planning. Teachers give multi-level opportunities in order for all children to have the ability to participate within each activity. The teachers design their curriculum to include goals, materials needed, planned experiences, and intentional learning opportunities for each child. These experiences along with relationship building methods take place throughout each day within planned, spontaneous, indoor and outdoor activities, during transition times as well as snack and lunch times. With assistance from the Education Coordinator and Director, teachers implement an integrated curriculum using the RI Early Learning and Development Standards learning goals and domains, individual child goals, along with the goals and cultural values of each child's family. Teachers provide varied options in materials, exploratory experiences and identify expected outcomes across all domains of learning. At the same time, children are allowed ample opportunities to be engaged in self-initiated activities using materials and experiences that are thoughtfully provided for open ended exploration and relevance to children's learning styles and skill levels.

## **CLASS Dimensions (Infant/Toddler/Pre-K Tools)**

The Academy uses the CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring Scale) Infant, Toddler and Pre-K Dimensions Overview booklets to evaluate and reflect upon the interactions that take place within each classroom learning environment.

CLASS is a research based observation assessment tool selected by the Rhode Island Department of Education in order to ensure positive learning and communication experiences for children. When the Education Coordinator or Director observes in a classroom they use these tools to guide their observation goals.

### **Infants/Early Toddlers**

#### **\*Relational Climate**

- Relational behaviors
  - Proximity
  - Eye contact
  - Joint attention
  - Affection
- Emotion expression
  - Smiling
  - Laughing
  - Enthusiasm
- Lack of adult negativity
  - Lack of irritation/frustration
  - Lack of verbal harshness
  - Lack of rough handling
  - Lack of negative comments

#### **\*Teacher Sensitivity**

- Awareness and cue detection
  - Visually scan
  - Attend physically
  - Acknowledge verbally and/or physically

#### **-Responsiveness**

- Respond to infants' emotions and needs
- Adjust actions based on individual needs of the infants

#### **-Infant comfort**

- Infants comfortable or content when teachers are present
- Infants seek out teachers
- Infants soothed or calmed by teachers' efforts

#### **\*Facilitated Exploration**

- Involvement

# Academy for Little Children

10 James P Murphy Highway  
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- Initiate interactions
  - Join in experiences
  - Mirror behavior
  - Infant focused
    - Follow infants' leads
    - Allow infants choice
    - Support exploration
  - Expansion of infants' experience
    - Encourage behavior
    - Vary intonation
    - Adjust experience
- \*Early Language Support**
- Teacher talk
    - Self-talk
    - Describe classroom events
    - Verbally label objects
    - Use complete and varied sentences
  - Communication support
    - Initiate sounds or words
    - Imitate or repeats sounds
  - Communication extension
    - Provide words for infants' communication
    - Expand and extend on infants' communication
    - Model turn-taking

## Middle Toddlers/Older Toddlers

- \*Positive Climate**
- Relationships
    - Physical Proximity
    - Matched Positive Affect
    - Reciprocal Interactions
    - Peer Connections
  - Positive Effects
    - Smiling, laughter
    - Enthusiasm
    - Verbal or physical affection
  - Respect
    - Warm, calm voice
    - Respectful language and communication
    - Eye contact
    - Body orientation
- \*Negative Climate**
- Negative affect
    - Irritability
    - Anger
    - Harsh Voice
  - Punitive Control
    - Yelling
    - Threats

- Physical action/punishments
- Teacher Negativity
  - Sarcastic voice/statement
  - Teasing
  - Humiliation
- Child Negativity
  - Peer disputes
  - Escalating frustration
  - Escalating negativity

## \*Teacher Sensitivity

- Awareness
  - Is attentive to children throughout the classroom
  - Notices difficulties or children who are upset
- Responsiveness
  - Responds for children's bids for attention
  - Acknowledges and accepts emotions
  - Provides comfort
- Child comfort
  - Freely approaches and participates
  - Seeks support
  - Genuine problem resolution

## \*Regard for Child Perspectives

- Child Focus
  - Follows children's lead
  - Provides choices
  - Elicits children's expressions and ideas
- Flexibility
  - Allows movement and talking
  - "Goes with the flow"
  - Adjusts pacing for individual children
- Support of Independence
  - Child responsibility
  - Support of self-care
  - Materials accessible
  - Peer perspective taking

## \*Behavior Guidance

- Positive behavior
  - Actively monitors children's behavior
  - Communicates clear expectations
  - Children demonstrate awareness of expectations
- Supporting positive behavior

- Reinforcement of positive behavior
- Effective redirection
- Specificity in redirection and/or direction
- Positive phrasing of positive behavior
- Problem behavior
  - Minimal wandering
  - Minimal waiting
  - Lack of disruptive or potentially dangerous behavior
- \*Facilitation of Learning and Development
  - Active facilitation
    - Teacher provides opportunities for exploration and learning
    - Teacher guides exploration
    - Teacher is involved in and supports activities to support learning and development
  - Expansion of cognition
    - Teacher provides and embeds information
    - Teacher relates information to children's lives and experiences
    - Teacher integrates concepts across activities and tasks
    - Teacher encourages thinking skills
  - Children's active engagement
    - Manipulation of materials
    - Physical involvement
    - Verbal involvement
- \*Quality of Feedback
  - Scaffolding
    - Hints
    - Verbal or physical assistance
    - Prompting thought processes
  - Providing information
    - Clarification of concepts or tasks
    - Expansion and elaboration
  - Encouragement and affirmation
    - Individual Feedback
    - Specific Feedback
    - Recognition of effort or accomplishment
- \*Language Modeling
  - Supporting language use
    - Back and forth exchanges
    - Contingent responding
    - Open-ended questioning
  - Repetition and expansion
    - Repeats

- Extends/elaborates
- Self- and parallel talk
  - Describes own actions with language
  - Narrates children's actions with language
- Advanced language
  - Variety of words and/or descriptive vocabulary
  - Labeling
  - Connections to familiar words and ideas

## Preschool/Pre-Kindergarten

- \*Positive Climate
  - Relationships
    - Physical proximity
    - Shared activities
    - Peer assistance
    - Matched affect
    - Social conversation
  - Positive Affect
    - Smiling
    - Laughter
    - Enthusiasm
  - Positive Communication
    - Verbal affection
    - Physical affection
    - Positive expectations
  - Respect
    - Eye contact
    - Warm, calm voice
    - Respectful language
    - Cooperation and/or sharing
- \*Negative Climate
  - Negative Affect
    - Irritability
    - Anger
    - Harsh voice
    - Peer aggression
    - Disconnected or escalating negativity
  - Punitive Control
    - Yelling
    - Threats
    - Physical control
    - Harsh punishment
  - Sarcasm/Disrespect
    - Sarcastic voice/statement
    - Teasing
    - Humiliation
  - Severe Negativity
    - Victimization
    - Bullying
    - Physical punishment

\*Teacher Sensitivity

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- Awareness
  - Anticipates problems and plans appropriately
  - Notices lack of understanding and/ or difficulties
- Responsiveness
  - Acknowledges emotions
  - Provides comfort and assistance
  - Provides individualized support
- Addresses Problems
  - Helps in an effective and timely manner
  - Helps resolve problems
- Student Comfort
  - Seeks support and guidance
  - Freely participates
  - Takes risks
- \*Regard for Child Perspectives
  - Flexibility and Student Focus
    - Shows flexibility
    - Incorporates student's ideas
    - Follows lead
  - Support for Autonomy and Leadership
    - Allows choice
    - Allows students to lead lessons
    - Gives students responsibilities
  - Student Expression
    - Encourages student talk
    - Elicits ideas and/or perspectives
  - Restriction of Movement
    - Allows movement
    - Is not rigid
- \*Behavior Management
  - Clear Behavior Expectations
    - Clear expectations
    - Consistency
    - Clarity of rules
  - Proactive
    - Anticipates of problem behavior or escalation
    - Low reactivity
    - Monitors
  - Redirection of Misbehavior
    - Effective reduction of misbehavior
    - Attention to the positive
    - Uses subtle cues to redirect
    - Efficient redirection
  - Student Behavior
    - Frequent compliance
    - Little aggression and defiance
- \*Productivity
  - Maximizing Learning Time
    - Provision of activities
- Choice when finished
- Few disruptions
- Effective completion of managerial tasks
- Pacing
- Routines
  - Students know what to do
  - Clear instructions
  - Little wandering
- Transitions
  - Brief
  - Explicit follow-through
  - Learning opportunities within
- Preparation
  - Materials ready and accessible
  - Knows lessons
- \*Instructional Learning Formats
  - Effective Facilitation
    - Teacher involvement
    - Effective questioning
    - Expanding children's involvement
  - Variety of Modalities and Materials
    - Range of auditory, visual, and movement opportunities
    - Interesting and creative materials
    - Hands-on opportunities
  - Student Interest
    - Active participation
    - Listening
    - Focused attention
  - Clarity of Learning Objectives
    - Advanced organizers
    - Summaries
    - Reorientation statements
- \*Concept Development
  - Analysis and Reasoning
    - Why and/or how questions
    - Problem solving
    - Prediction/experimentation
    - Classification/comparison
    - Evaluation
  - Creating
    - Brainstorming
    - Planning
    - Producing
  - Integration
    - Connect concepts
    - Integrates with previous knowledge
  - Connections to the Real World
    - Real-world applications
    - Related to students' lives
- \*Quality of Feedback
  - Scaffolding

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- Hints
- Assistance
- Feedback Loops
  - Back-and-forth exchanges
  - Persistence by teacher
  - Follow-up questions
- Prompting Thought Processes
  - Asks students to explain thinking
  - Queries responses and actions
- Providing Information
  - Expansion
  - Clarification
  - Specific feedback
- Encouragement and Affirmation
  - Recognition
  - Reinforcement
  - Student persistence

## \*Language Modeling

- Frequent Conversations
  - Back-and-forth exchanges
  - Contingent responding
  - Peer conversations
- Open-Ended Questions
  - Questions require more than a one-word response
  - Students respond
- Repetition and Extension
  - Repeats
  - Extends/elaborates
- Self- and Parallel Talk
  - Maps own actions with language
  - Maps student action with language
- Advanced Language
  - Variety of words
  - Connected to familiar words and/ or ideas

In order to best meet the individual needs of the students, teachers must engage in a variety of teaching behaviors and take on various roles throughout the day. Based upon the NAEYC Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice, good teachers continually use their knowledge and judgment to make intentional decisions about which materials, interactions and learning experiences are to be most effective for the group and each child within the classroom.

Teachers allow children to have multiple options and opportunities for learning and expressing what they learned and pairing the learning environment and teaching strategies to the learners.

Within the classrooms from Infants to Prekindergarten, teachers use various teaching methods while the children explore throughout the day.

## Continuum of Teacher Behaviors

Non-directive

Mediating

Directive

Acknowledge	Model	Facilitate	Support	Scaffold	Co-Construct	Direct
* Give attention and positive encouragement to keep a child actively engaged.	*Display for children a skill or desirable way of behaving in the classroom, through actions only or with cues, prompts, or other forms of coaching.	*Offer short-term assistance to help achieve the next level of functioning. (Ex: an adult holds a child's hand when practicing holding a pencil and writing, then lightens grip finally lets go while child continues independently.)	*Provide a fixed form of assistance, such as guiding the child through the process of an activity.	*Set up challenges or assist children to work "on the edge" of their current competencies.	*Learn to work collaboratively with children on a problem or a task, such as building a model or block structure.	*Provide specific directions for children's behavior with narrowly defined dimension of error.

As previously stated, the Academy believes teachers should act as facilitators who take into consideration each child's unique learning styles, interests, strengths, and needs. Teachers do this by intentionally planning learning centers that are engaging and allow for more than one way to play. They also must plan for ways that children can extend their learning. For example, a "nature" center could be comprised of rocks, pine cones, acorns, twigs, leaves, sand, containers, sorting cups, child tweezers, a magnifying glass, a scale, and more. Children who visit this center can engage with the materials in ways that are meaningful and interesting to them. One child may focus on sorting, while another uses the magnifying glass to inspect each object. One student may focus on filling and dumping, while yet another tackles picking up small objects with tweezers. Multiple domains of learning can be addressed in this one center. The teacher can provide even more challenges and discussions by bringing in books about nature. The children can search through the books for the objects and discuss where each item might be found in their community. The teacher plays an important role in

the learning process when he/she observes the children playing and interacts with them in a meaningful manner. A child placing objects on the scale will expand his knowledge when asked higher-level thinking questions such as, “Which rock is heavier? How do you know? Can you think of a way to balance the scale?”

When planning the curriculum, it is imperative that teachers base their lessons and activities on the children’s developmental levels, learning styles, and interests. If the desired objectives are not developmentally appropriate, the children will be bored. A three-piece puzzle will prove to be uninteresting for most preschoolers (unless there is an identified concern such as fine motor) but is perfectly suitable for a toddler classroom. If a classroom of preschoolers has a hard time sitting for circle time, the teacher must learn to adapt and teach the desired skills/concepts in a way that incorporates movement and energy. For example, instead of the entire group listening to one child count to 20, the teacher could have the whole class perform 20 jumping jacks or hop 20 times. The desired skill remains the same, but the method of delivery can change to reflect the needs of the children.

Quality curriculum development is dependent upon accurate and objective formative assessment. A teacher who knows the students well will be able to meet their needs better than one who does not assess. The Academy uses the online assessment tool, Teaching Strategies GOLD, or TSG. TSG allows teachers to take pictures, videos, and notes of children during and after play. The data is uploaded to each child’s individual private portfolio. A teacher who is taking ongoing observations and pictures will be able to view a child’s portfolio and create a child-specific report. This allows the teacher to see areas of strength and need for the child. Once areas are identified, they can be addressed. If a child seems to be struggling with gross motor skills, the teacher can create and adapt plans that will address that concern (incorporating more movement activities, creating obstacle courses, doing yoga). Documentation is critical, especially if a child needs to be referred for screening and/or evaluation for services.

A teacher using TSG properly can also run reports to see how the entire class is developing. It will also allow him/her to reflect upon his/her own teaching practices. If there is a plethora of documentation in the language and literacy domains, but very little in the science domain, the teacher should reflect that knowledge in future planning and intentionally incorporate more science activities. If a teacher notices that many children are not falling in the color scale assigned to their age range for language, the teacher should question how to help them. Perhaps he/she will focus on language more at circle time or in small groups. Perhaps he/she will include more family engagement activities that focus on language. Gathering data in the form of formative assessments is only helpful and beneficial if the teacher uses that data to drive their practice, namely the planning and implementation of future curriculum.

An effective teacher will not wait until TSG “checkpoints” to analyze children’s growth and development. Teachers are provided with paid planning time (1 hour per week for infants through pre-k, 2 hours daily for state funded pre-k). During this time, teachers should enter data into TSG, analyze what the data means, and use that information to work on their upcoming lesson plans. This is a continuous process that repeatedly cycles and often includes the Education Coordinator. There have been numerous instances where a classroom teacher has asked to repeat or extend an activity, lesson, or center. Our older infant teacher would extend lessons that the children seemed to really enjoy. For example, the children were very excited about a unit on balls. Instead of moving onto the next topic, she extended the ball unit and incorporated more RIELDS and TSG objectives. The children were exposed to some activities, such as “Which balls float and which sink in water?” that would not have otherwise occurred had the teacher not capitalized on the children’s interests. A second example

happened in one of our preschool classrooms. The teacher noticed that the students were getting very involved in a unit on ocean life and marine animals. Instead of moving on when she had initially planned, she asked if she could extend and introduce the students to several more ocean animals. She went to the library and brought in a greater variety of books to share. The children turned many areas of the classroom into seascapes and used scientific tools to explore and experiment. The teacher knew from analyzing her TSG data how much the students were interested in the topic. That data helped her to make the decision to extend the learning and identify new learning objectives. She then found ways to integrate those objectives into the topic the children were enjoying so much.

Since curriculum planning and child assessment go hand-in-hand, it is only natural to involve parents and families in both processes. Teachers reflect upon information provided to them by families, and use that knowledge to choose subjects/topics, activities, materials, and more. For example, a parent might mention that the entire family went camping during their vacation and little Jimmy loved fishing. The teacher could use that information and find out what the class knows about camping. The dramatic play area could be set up as a campsite and Jimmy could help lead the set up. Because the teacher knows from analyzing TSG data that Jimmy is struggling with sorting, s/he could create a fishing game where the children have to sort the various fish they catch by size, color, shape, etc. In this example, the teacher is not only drawing upon the experience shared by the parent, but is also using knowledge gained through reflection of assessment data to individualize activities. The teacher could even extend the learning by sharing the fishing game with Jimmy's family in an attempt to help strengthen his sorting skills at home.

Child Assessment data is shared with families in a variety of ways. Teachers formally meet with families at least 3 times per year. During the conference, parents are provided with a TSG conference form that highlights their child's strengths and details next steps for learning and development. Teachers can also share specific documentation pieces on the computer or in print at this time. Educators do not wait for conferences to discuss children's learning informally. At pickup time, a teacher might tell Jamie's mother that she was able to successfully cut out a circle on cardstock, or that she noticed a friend was crying during center time and went over to provide comfort. If there is a concern about a child's development, it is never discussed in front of children or other adults, but rather a conference is set up to protect the child's right to confidentiality. During these meetings, teachers present their assessment data that they have been analyzing during their planning times.

Family Engagement is just as valuable to an excellent curriculum as Child Assessment. Families know their children best and can provide insight into how we can best help them. Teachers should use the questionnaires filled out at enrollment and at each transition to gain knowledge not only about the students and their needs, but also about goals and hopes that each family possesses. This type of information can also be shared at conferences and through verbal and email exchanges. Teachers must utilize that information to ensure a seamless transition to and from school. If a parent shares a child's life-threatening allergy with the school, the teacher will not only refrain from lessons and activities that include that food, but will also ensure that other children do not expose the child to the allergen. If a single mom of four children reports that her preschooler is awake until midnight when she naps at school and doesn't normally take a nap on the weekends, the teacher should work with the mother to attempt to shorten or eliminate sleeping at school, if at all possible.

On enrollment paperwork, families describe what holidays they celebrate and what customs they observe. Teacher use this knowledge to make sure they are including all children in the classroom's curriculum and

culture. It also can help us bridge the gap between home and school. For example, if we know a family is Jewish, we will make sure Jewish holidays are not forgotten. We have had several Jewish parents come into the classrooms to read books, cook cultural foods, and teach us about holidays such as Hanukkah. We have had Chinese families discuss Chinese New Year and show us their cultural clothing. We have had a father from Morocco come in and teach us how to write our names in Arabic. In every instance, the teachers initiated the idea because they were learning about the cultures and invited the families in to share. When a family feels welcome, they usually participate.

Families are vital to planning curriculum when children with special needs are involved. They are able to provide teachers with insight into the child's developmental past, as well as techniques that may or may not work with their child. While two children with spina bifida may have many characteristics in common, they are still two separate and distinct children and what works for one may not work for the other. Families can also be an integral part of assessment as well. For example, we have had a child refuse to speak at all for an entire school year, yet was talkative and loud at home. The parents were able to provide videos of the child speaking and actually implemented certain lessons at home in order for the teacher to get an accurate, well-rounded view of the child's abilities.

## **INFANTS AND TODDLERS**

While this curriculum framework has included infants, toddler, and preschoolers, there are several key expectations for teachers who care for infants and toddlers. We acknowledge that families are the most significant people in a child's life and are deserving of respect. It is our responsibility to build relationships with those family members in order to develop a strong trust. As stated earlier, we encourage families to visit the classroom often and keep a running dialogue open with our teachers. Without trust and communication, there cannot be quality continuity of care. Children should witness positive and cheerful interactions between their teachers and family. Teachers must respect parents' wishes and treat their children with the same amount of care and love. If a parent makes a request that goes against our philosophy or regulations, they should still be treated with respect. The teacher and/or administrator can explain why we cannot follow through and can work on coming up with a resolution. For example, if a parent brings in a sleeping infant in the car seat on a daily basis and does not want to wake the baby because the baby becomes upset, the teacher and administrator can explain that DCYF regulations require that all sleeping babies must be in cribs. That would lead into a conversation about safe sleeping practices. To show respect and compassion for the parent's situation, the teacher can offer to be the one to remove the child from the car seat and transfer him/her to the crib. This solution might prove beneficial to all parties. Respect for concerns should always be shown.

Teachers working with infants and toddlers must provide responsive care routines and demonstrate flexibility. Infants are on their own schedules, ones that are established through collaboration between teachers and families. While we introduce toddlers to the idea of a schedule, teachers must still be sensitive to the needs of the children. If the children are supposed to have lunch at noon but are fussy and crying for food at 11:40, teachers should respond appropriately and serve lunch a little early. If a toddler is falling asleep at 9:00 am., the teacher should provide a safe area in which the child can rest on his/her cot, instead of keeping the child up until naptime.

Additionally, teachers must take children's temperaments and personalities into consideration. Toddlers have not mastered the skill of sharing yet and should not be punished for that. A teacher should realize that

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introducing one ball on the playground with 12 toddlers will cause problems and perhaps tantrums. A reflective teacher will bring out multiple balls and/or have a plan for sharing. A teacher who knows that when a specific child gets mad, she tends to scratch, will position herself near that child during play experiences. The teacher will help the child use her words and safe hands, until she is able to negotiate a play situation on her own. Language is critical to infant and toddler development, as children who cannot communicate may become frustrated and act out. High-quality teachers use rich-language throughout all routines and activities, including diaper changes, mealtimes, and play. Every experience is a learning one for infants and toddlers. Teachers may use various techniques to promote language, including verbal language, songs, sign language, picture schedule and cards, and more. Children with a speech and language delay benefit greatly through the use of tools because they can communicate with others in non-verbal ways.

Teachers at the Academy recognize the importance of the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards to their classroom curriculum and know that learning begins at birth. Our job at the Academy for Little Children is to provide our children with the materials, activities, and experiences that that will help them grow, develop, and learn in preparation for kindergarten.