

THE DISCOVERY SCHOOL HANDBOOK

CURRICULUM

We create a learning environment at our school that fosters independence, divergent thinking, creativity, and a love for learning that lasts a lifetime. This handbook discusses each academic aspect along with examples so you can fully understand our program and why we consider it the best prescription for learning. We believe that learning happens when it is meaningful for each child. Learning must occur in a natural way so that it is seen as play not memorization, worksheets or meaningless drills. Our play based curriculum allows children the freedom to grow in their own unique way.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment is structured to ensure the success of every student. We look at our workspace as an additional teacher whose help is imperative. Our environment is exciting, sensory rich, and provokes children to take another look at materials in the room. The environment is organized so materials are readily available and in a logical spot. The room structure helps to create a sense of autonomy, gives children choices, and allows for less intervention from teachers/adults. This gives children the tools for success and the choice to explore what is interesting to them.

ART

We use open ended materials for children to develop their own unique art work. Some examples of the open ended materials are recycled items and items found in nature. Children will be exposed to various art media such as markers, crayons, chalk, charcoals, pastels, colored and drawing pencils, acrylic and watercolor paints, different textures of paper to work with, and clay. Art is an integral part of our curriculum and children can choose to be involved in art projects as much as they desire. We want children to view art as a unique expression of who they are so you won't see models for children to duplicate, stencils, or coloring books that require children to see art in a specific way.

MATERIALS

You will see open-ended materials in our classroom as well as real world objects. We want children's imagination to fuel their use of the materials. We don't want the manufacturer of the toys to be influencing and dictating the use of

specific materials. This kind of environment fosters the joy of lifelong learning as well as helping children become problem solvers and possess divergent thinking skills.

SCHEDULE

Our schedule provides continuity for the children in our classroom. They know specifically what order things happen in each day. The day is predictable and they are able to count on what will happen each day at school. This allows for smooth transition throughout the entire day. Please understand that our program is child centered and that sometimes we must make adjustments for the well being of all children.

DISCIPLINE

A responsibility guidance system (positive guidance/re-direction) governs our limit setting in the classroom. Children have power, ownership, and control in our classroom, as do all members of our classroom community. Our classroom, as a whole, decides on the limits for our room and these limits are enforced at all times. Children know the expectations and are given choices within our structure. This allows children the freedom to explore while creating a safe environment for everyone. Feelings are always validated in our classroom. We create an environment where all children have autonomy, are able to communicate feelings and understand the consequences of their behavior. They learn to develop empathy for all members of our community and are able to solve their own problems without intervention.

READING/WRITING/LANGUAGE ARTS

Our approach to reading is based on a whole language philosophy which includes various strategies to help a reader succeed. This includes using predictable text/rhyming text, pictorial clues, and phonics. Reading is a part of our daily schedule and students can bring home a book of their choice each night. Students will also have a listening center where they can listen to stories and follow along with the text of the book. We want children to be exposed to quality children's literature and books where reading success is guaranteed. We want children to begin to write in a meaningful way. It is important to allow children to write approximations of a word as they begin to spell. We work with children by helping them hear sounds in a word and by helping them to acquire the tools to find new words for themselves. For example, we help them to develop strategies for finding the spelling of a new word by helping them use a dictionary, asking a friend or teacher to help find the word, or by finding the word in a familiar story. They will also practice writing skills by creating grocery lists, project lists, steps involved in cooking, and in other natural ways that writing occurs. Students will begin writing their own stories by dictating to a teacher/volunteer and then they will begin writing on their own. It is important to understand that children will become readers and writers on their own and in their own time. We want to be there for encouragement but never to push them. Children will learn to read naturally by being exposed to literature. Children learn to talk by listening to others talk to them and it is the same for reading. We are not worried about your child being a reader or writer by some pre-determined deadline that is meaningless. We will just be there to provide the opportunity when they are ready.

SCIENCE

Students will be exploring nature by taking daily hikes on our trails and through our spring fed creeks. They will be developing a sense of community and environmental awareness by recycling, composting, planting, and maintaining a garden. We have a microscope set up to take a closer look at insects and other creatures found at our school. We will make our own slides to look at, and explore, our surroundings in depth. We have a terrarium set up so we can observe objects from nature in their natural habitat. Students will be learning basic science concepts, understanding what it means to be part of a community, and developing a sense of responsibility and appreciation for our environment.

Water play is naturally built in to our environment. Our bathroom is designed for children's water play. They will be constantly measuring, adding color and soap to water, using cylinders, funnels, tubing, and other containers. They will be able to see the properties of the water change as they manipulate it.

MATH

We use open ended materials such as rocks, shells, leaves, pinecones, as well as beads, unifix cubes, and geoboards to count, show one to one correspondence, show measurement-length and width, show identity of shapes, etc. Students will begin to see symmetry and patterns. They will learn basic concepts of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and geometry. This learning will occur by counting and measuring when activities like cooking, water play and making grocery lists happen. We take advantage of natural times like these to teach math concepts while a child is fully engaged so that learning takes place *naturally*. Each child's own natural rhythm is respected so children are not forced into work that is meaningless to them.

ASSESSMENT

We will create portfolios for every student in our classroom. We will use these portfolios for assessment and it will be a visual record of your child's year at school. This is a wonderful way to see a child's progression throughout a school year. Document boards on our walls will keep families informed of the many projects we are involved in and this will also serve as a record and springboard for further activities and growth. Parent/teacher conferences will be held twice a year but please feel free to schedule a conference whenever you feel that you need one. These assessments will show not only children's progress but also their processes and their finished products.

To stay in touch on a regular basis with each family, we will send home a weekly folder with a synopsis of the week, art projects, stories, observations, and any other relevant information from the school. These folders will go home on Friday and come back to school on Monday. Please feel free to send notes in these folders as well.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

To make our program work, we must truly create a partnership with our parent body. We will need a commitment of time from you. The first item will be to attend an orientation session of what to expect from our school. We want our parent body to become active in the decision making process of our school. We want and value your input. We will like you to commit to coming to a specific number of work days which will be held on a few Saturdays, attend our parent group meetings, and volunteer at the school as your time allows. As always, parents are welcome and encouraged to visit at anytime. We have an open door policy.

TUITION AND FEES
FOR ENROLLMENT AFTER 1/1/2009
MONTHLY TUITION:

\$785.00 (effective January 1, 2009)

After school care is provided for any students needing this service at the Children's Discovery Center. After school care is \$75.00 a month for care from 4:00-6:00. If you pick your child up by 4:00 (at DS or using the first van), you will not be charged for after school care.

REGISTRATION/BOOK FEES

There is an annual registration fee of \$150. This fee offsets the annual cost of added curriculum, pool and van expenses, and our school library.

HOLIDAYS:

We follow a modified version of the Austin Independent School District calendar for all holidays and teacher training days. Please see the yearly calendar for details.

DEPOSIT/WAITING LIST:

DEPOSIT: \$300

This deposit will secure your child's place in line to get into the Discovery School. Please send the deposit and enrollment form together in order to reserve a place in line for your child. See the director for details if you have any questions.

After you are enrolled and attending The Discovery School, half of this deposit will be refundable if you give thirty days written notice of withdrawal. The other half is a registration fee. (If you are a current student at CDC, your deposit will roll over to The Discovery School. You will still need to pay the \$150 registration fee.)

TYPICAL DAILY SCHEDULE FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2008-2009

7:30-9:30 Early Arrival at Children's Discovery Center for van

8:00 Arrival at the Discovery School, Projects are set out and children have choices of several activities and art projects

10:00 Second Van arrives at the Discovery School

10:00 Center choices for the day from: Library, Art room, Water play room, Manipulatives, Blocks, Science center, Take apart, Dramatic Play, Sensory Activity, Hike/Nature walk or Outside play.

10:00-10:30 Snack is available at the dining table

11:30-12:30 Lunch/ After lunch, outside play time

12:30-2:00 (Summer: Swimming in pool) School Year schedule: 11:15-11:30 Group Meeting Time, sing songs, stories, talk about day, 12:00-1:00 outside play, 1:00-2:00 nap/hiking/kindergarten time

1:00-2:00 Rest time for 1st group of swimmers, may look at books/rest quietly on mat

2:00-2:50 Snack, rap up projects for the day/clean up and pack up to go home for early van

2:50 Early van leaves

4:00 Load on 2nd van to go to CDC/Pick up at Discovery school (DS closes)

4:00-6:00 Children not signed up for after school program are picked up by parents at 4:00 (must use 2:50 van).

Van Schedule:

- 1) 1st van leaves CDC @ 8:30 and Arrives at DS @ 9:00
- 2) 2nd van leaves CDC @ 9:30 and Arrives at DS @ 10:00
- 3) 1st van leaves DS @ 2:45 and Arrives at CDC @ 3:15
- 4) 2nd van leaves DS @ 4:00 and Arrives at CDC @ 4:30

BASIC INFORMATION

HEALTH AND IMMUNIZATIONS

Each child will be given a check upon arrival at school. This is for the child's protection as well as for other children. Children with contagious symptoms or visible illness will not be allowed to stay at school. Children must be

able to take on an active day at school and be able to keep up with the pace of a normal school day. Any child that seems drained or not feeling well should not be at school. We do not have staffing available for sick child care. Other symptoms that will not be allowed in school are: fever above 100 degrees, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue or discolored mucous. If a child stays home or is sent home from school, they need to be **symptom free for at least 24 hours before returning to school.** Parents are encouraged to report any contagious diseases to the director for the safety of the rest of the children. Policies regarding exclusion and re-admittance are dictated by the regulations of the Health Department.

A written documentation of immunizations for measles, mumps, rubella, polio, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, tuberculosis, and Hib must be presented at the time of enrollment. You must have a notarized statement if are not immunizing. A well child statement from your child's doctor must also be presented. The immunization schedule you must follow is attached to the back of this handbook. You must keep the documentation of your child's immunizations current with the director.

NUTRITION

A nutritious snack is served in the afternoons at Discovery School around 2:00 p.m. We eat lunch around 11:30 a.m. **Please respect our low sugar/no chocolate or candy/no lunchables policies.** There is a nutrition suggestion package available from the director on ideas for quick/healthy lunches. Water is provided with lunch and snack.

HOLIDAYS

The school will be closed for the following days for the 2008-2009 school year: Labor Day (9/1), Veteran's Day (11/10), Thanksgiving and the Friday following, December 22 through January 2 inclusive, MLK Day (1/19), Spring Break(March 16-20) and Good Friday (4/10). The AISD calendar is the basis for this schedule, and tuition is not prorated for holidays.

Road Closing/Weather Conditions

The Discovery School is located between 2 water crossings on Spicewood Springs road. Occasionally, we have to close the school when the water is over the road. Since these road closures depend on the intensity and exact location of severe thunderstorms, we generally do not have very much warning when the gates come down and the road closes. Because of the short notice, we may not be able to notify everyone before the school closes. If the weather looks threatening, please be sure to call and check with us. You can sign up for our TWITTER updates by following “disco school” on Twitter. (Set up your Twitter account to get “texts”.) We will try to offer the option of re-locating at Hancock Recreation Center whenever possible. Be sure to call in to CDC and find out the exact nature of the re-grouping, as it will depend on the time of day, intensity of the weather, and the transportation issues at hand. Hancock Rec is located in on 41st Street just west of Red River (at the Golf Club Clubhouse).

Some phone numbers/websites to check when weather is threatening are: Susan Janek at 974-3327, TNRCC: 473-3200 (Flood Emergency Control Room), and Austin Emergency Management 974-0450. Websites:

http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/fews/water_level.cfm for flow rates of Bull Creek. Go to the second big graph and Bull Creek is the first creek listed. Any flow rate of 200 cubic feet per second will usually close the road. Normal flow is under 60 CFS, and when it stops raining, the crest is usually an hour after that. Between the two large graphs is the Rainwater Chart shortcut, click on the word “chart” and scroll down to the Bull Creek section to see the 5 collection sites along Bull Creek broken down to 15 minute intervals. Any rain close to one inch per hour will usually make the flow rate go above 200 CFS (unless the creek starts out empty, since the ground saturation condition comes into play for how much of the rain gets absorbed vs running off)

Road closures can be found on the following sites:

http://www.srh.noaa.gov/showsigwx.php?warnzone=TXZ192&warncounty=TXC453&local_place1=Austin&product1=HAZARDOUS+WEATHER+OUTLOOK

http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/oem/oem_results.cfm

Obviously we will always err on the side of caution, and we can always hike up to the Jester water tank and pick up the kids from that hiking trail, so it is never imperative to try and get out quickly!

2009/10 List of Supplies Needed For Discovery School Explorers

- ◆ A backpack to carry labeled clothes, etc back and forth on the van
- ◆ Personal water bottle with name on it (Also a strap can be helpful)
- ◆ Hiking shoes (possibly to leave at school w/name on them), sandals/flip flops for the pool

- ◆ Lunch box with an ice pack (See our list of lunch suggestions)
- ◆ One complete change of clothes to keep at school, extra underwear
- ◆ Swimsuit, Gel Sunscreen (Preferably Bullfrog or Aloe Gator)
- ◆ Sheet, Blanket, and special nap item (if your child needs it for nap)
- ◆ **Please leave all toys at home and be sure to label all belongings with a permanent marker.**