

# *Early Learning Center*



## *Family Handbook*

Early Learning Center  
Messiah College  
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(717) 796-5043

[www.messiah.edu/academics/early\\_learning](http://www.messiah.edu/academics/early_learning)

7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Monday-Friday



*Messiah College Early Learning Center does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, color, age, disability, or national or ethnic origin in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs and activities. Program services shall be made accessible to eligible persons with disabilities through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limited to, equipment redesign, the provision of aides, and the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods.*

# *Early Learning Center*



## **Quick Reference Contact Information**

Center Office & Administrative Assistant	796-5043
Director	691-6085
Family Grouping Classroom	796-1800 ext. 3968
Extended Care Classroom	796-1800 ext. 3964
AM Lab School Classroom	796-1800 ext. 3962
AM/PM Lab School Classroom	796-1800 ext. 3961

***7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Monday-Friday***



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Note that the numbering throughout this handbook corresponds to the NAEYC criteria reflected in that section. Special thanks to Carnegie Melon University Children’s School, Pittsburgh, PA, for allowing us to use language and content from their Parent Handbook.

## **Welcome!**

Thank you for your interest in the Messiah College Early Learning Center. The purpose of this handbook is to provide an organized source of detailed information specifically related to our programs for children, policies and procedures, philosophy for learning, and the ways that families can partner with us to ensure a high quality experience for all of the learners at the Early Learning Center. We hope that you will also utilize our website to explore the programs offered by the ELC ([www.messiah.edu/academics/early\\_learning](http://www.messiah.edu/academics/early_learning)).

We want this Center to be your child's home away from home. Therefore we are committed to you as a family and will strive to work in partnership with you to meet the needs of your child. We believe and respect the fact that parents are the child's first teachers and the most significant providers of care and education in a child's life. We are honored to serve as an extension of that nurturing care and education.

Please feel free to call (717) 796-5043 if you would like more information. We look forward to collaborating with you!

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Early Learning Center is to provide quality early childhood programming to children and families while serving as a training site for pre-service educators and social science students. The Early Learning Center is dedicated to providing both experiential learning and research opportunities to students and professionals.

## **Relationship to Messiah College**

The Early Learning Center is located in the lower level of Hostetter Chapel on the campus of Messiah College. The half-day Lab School Program was established in 1972 and serves as a site for Early Childhood training and education for the College. In 1999, full-day childcare was added to meet the needs of Messiah College faculty, staff, and students. Both programs within the Early Learning Center exist to provide a model of high quality early childhood programming for children and their families.

Our program is strengthened by our relationship with Messiah College. (8.B.02) As part of the college community, our classes have access to facilities such as the gym and track, the pool, and a variety of interesting places to take field trips such as the post office, fine arts building, Oakes museum, and radio station (WVMM). (8.B.04) Students completing practicum and field experiences in Early Childhood Education and related fields of study will be involved in the classroom at various intervals throughout the semester. Undergraduates taking the introductory child developmental course, and other related courses, make detailed observations at the observation windows throughout the day in order to gather information for course projects. Many of these students return as student assistants and teachers who enhance our children's experience while their involvement here strengthens their connections between theory, research and practice.

## **Program Philosophy (2.A.01)**

The staff at the Messiah College Early Learning Center believes that children should be provided with nurturing care, learning experiences, positive encouragement, and opportunities for growth. We continually strive to use developmentally appropriate goals for young children as a framework for planning our educational program and assessing children's progress in all aspects of the social-emotional, cognitive, and physical foundations necessary for later school success. We emphasize diversity throughout our program, and our individualized, developmental approach lends itself to

meeting the unique needs of most children. In addition, children are cared for in an environment where Christian teachers and program components emphasize and model strong values and moral development. Our classrooms are family grouped, which allow children the opportunity to support, care for, and learn from one another, regardless of age or ability.

We believe that children are happiest if their development and growth occur within a balanced schedule of structure and flexibility. The Center's daily schedule is flexible, with enough structure to provide children with developmentally appropriate learning experiences that will contribute to their knowledge of basic living and educational skills. Our goal is also to help each child experience a healthy feeling of self worth in an atmosphere that fosters safety, security, and regularity of routine. When children feel safe and good about themselves, they are better able to interact with others and have a positive impact on the whole group. It is our goal to help all children achieve this crucial life skill. Our approach is aligned with the guidelines set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for developmentally appropriate practice.

## **Educational Goals (2.A.01)**

We use our developmental objectives as a systematic framework for focusing our program and assessment design. Our teachers are well versed in a wide variety of educational approaches, and we choose teaching strategies, daily routines, classroom arrangements, and curriculum structure that will encourage each child's development. Teacher observations and documentation of individual development are used to adjust the program to better challenge individual development, as well as to conference with parents about ways we can work as a team to support each child. This means that your child's interests and individual needs shape activities and curriculum.

## **Developmental Objectives (2.A.01)**

Following the PA Early Learning Standards, we have specified learning goals for infants through preschoolers in each of the following key learning areas:

Personal/ Social - encouraging each child's pride in individual characteristics, families, experiences, and accomplishments and each child's responsibility for personal care, actions, and words. Also promoting children's social skills for diverse adult and peer relations, including listening, turn-taking, following directions, rules and routines, group participation, care for shared materials, and conflict resolution.

Language and Literacy - facilitating comprehension and expression skills beginning with oral and progressing to written language.

Approaches to Learning and Cognitive Development - fostering a positive attitude toward learning through questioning, observing, and experimenting with varied materials related to diverse themes.

Physical Health - giving children opportunities to use their growing bodies to develop small and large motor skills and coordination.

Creative Arts - cultivating each child's ability to express ideas and emotions through art, music, movement, and drama.

## **Accreditation**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has created 10 standards

that measure the quality of early childhood programs. The standards were created by a blue-ribbon panel of early childhood experts and are based on the latest early chil



As a NAEYC-accredited program, the Early Learning Center meets a high quality standard by:

- 1) Promoting **positive relationships** for all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth.
- 2) Implementing a **curriculum** that fosters all areas of child development: cognitive, emotional, language, physical, and social.
- 3) Using developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate **effective teaching approaches**.
- 4) Providing **ongoing assessments** of a child's learning and development and communicate the child's progress to the family.
- 5) Promoting the **nutrition and health** of children and protect children and staff from injury and illness.
- 6) Employing a **teaching staff** that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development, and to support families' diverse needs and interests.
- 7) Establishing and maintain collaborative relationships with each child's **family**.
- 8) Establishing relationships with and use the resources of the **community** to support the achievement of program goals.
- 9) Providing a safe and healthy **physical environment**.
- 10) Implementing strong personnel, fiscal, and program management policies so that all children, families, and staff have **high-quality experiences**.

The Early Learning Center Childcare program is licensed through the PA Department of Public Welfare, and the Lab School is licensed through the PA Department of Education, as a private academic school. The director and assistant director collaborate with ELC staff to guide the documentation procedures and complete the required paperwork for annual reporting and re-accreditation for NAEYC, yearly DPW compliance visits and PDE licensing, and Keystone STARS, Star 4 designation.

Keystone STARS is an initiative of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) to improve, support, and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early learning programs in Pennsylvania. The Keystone STARS Performance Standards provide the foundation for the program. The Performance Standards are grouped into four levels: STAR 1, STAR 2, STAR 3, and STAR 4.

Each level builds on the previous level and utilizes research-based best practices to promote quality early learning environments and positive child outcomes. The standards address staff qualifications and professional development, the early learning program, partnerships with family and community, and leadership and management.

We would be happy to discuss any aspect of Keystone STARS, licensing and NAEYC accreditation with interested families.

## **Curriculum and Assessment (2.A.02-06)**

Teaching teams use the PA Early Learning Standards as a flexible framework for planning learning experiences to promote the growth of each individual child, (3.F.01) rather than using a fixed curriculum guide. We develop our plans to provide children with a variety of opportunities for learning and encourage broad exploration. We strive to support a variety of social experiences by organizing our time and space to balance individual, pair, small group, and large group activities. Staff members serve as coaches as children practice social skills involved in peer interactions, friendship formation, and conflict resolution. Throughout the day, we engage children in conversation, with extra support for

peer conversation at snack and small group time.

## **Thematic Approach to Curriculum**

The teachers prepare an engaging learning environment for exploring a theme, such as “things with wheels”, an author/illustrator, the forest, or healthy living. They choose a rich range of materials, including diverse technologies, to entice each of the children to engage in the thematic study (9.A.13). They use a group meeting time each day to set the stage for the investigation and introduce relevant concepts. Then the children pursue a variety of activities that reinforce the learning goals. They avoid commercial characters and prescribed products in favor of open-ended explorations that promote creativity and imagination.

## **Assessment Plan (4.A.01-03)**

Assessment is naturally integrated into the course of every day as ongoing teacher observation of group patterns and individual development is used to adjust the program to better support group and individual progress. Teaching teams meet weekly to identify the group’s current interests and needs and then plan accordingly for the next week’s explorations (4.D.02). At times, these reflections indicate the need for altering the classroom environment, shifting the unit focus, trying new teaching strategies, etc. If concerns arise that are not readily remedied via classroom adaptations, teachers initiate a dialogue with colleagues and parents to plan approaches to try at both home and school (7.C.).

The assessment process is typically collaborative, with the child’s primary caregiver or small group teacher writing the report with input from the teaching team, including the Extended Care teachers in the Lab school program. Assessment data are incorporated into the narrative conference report written by the child’s small group teacher or primary caregiver, in November and May. These written reports, along with portfolios, documenting the child’s development and participation in the program, are shared with parents, both in writing and via personal conferences. Dialogue between teachers and parents during conferences strengthens our understanding of each child’s developmental profile and often leads to ideas for individualizing both staff and parent support of children’s learning, as well as plans for smooth transitions into the next classroom or to a kindergarten program (7.B, 7.C. 06-07). Because of the detailed discussion of child progress, conferences typically last 20 minutes and are not appropriate for children to attend. Childcare is not provided at the school during conferences, so parents should make other arrangements for their children. Many families share these responsibilities by arranging play dates or shared babysitters.

All families of children at the ELC are asked to complete the Ages and Stages questionnaire twice a year in order to provide a screening for possible developmental delays. (4.C.01) Occasionally, staff and /or parents identify the need for additional screening and referral for professional diagnostic assessment. In those cases, staff and parents typically include the director in the dialogue for the purpose of more precisely identifying the focus of the screening/assessment and to review the resources available to children and families in our community. Program staff encourage families to regularly contribute to all decisions about their child’s goals and plans for activities and services. (7.B.04, 7.C.01-04). Eligibility for special services is determined by diagnostic assessments conducted by professionals after referral by ELC staff. The Center does not conduct any norm-referenced or standardized assessments for comparison purposes (4.B.03)

## **Assessment Procedures (4.B.01)**

Most assessment at the ELC is informal, with direct observation by staff members as the primary method. Teachers document observations through anecdotal notes, photographs of constructions and

interactions, samples of the child's artwork, early writing samples, and other projects. Center educators occasionally conduct more formal, individual assessments focused on precisely determining what a child knows or can do. Whenever possible, these assessments are designed as typical classroom activities and are widely distributed in time. For example, a teacher might assess knowledge of letters and numerals by having the child be the caller in a bingo game played with peers. Gross motor skills may be assessed by having children practice an obstacle course set up in the classroom or outside. With individuals, teachers often use puzzles or other manipulatives to check a child's knowledge of shapes, counting ability, etc. All of these assessments are conducted within the regular program space and during the typical program hours.

ELC assessments and conference forms are sensitive to diversity in the following ways (4.B.01). Assessments involve only activities that are familiar to the children, and every effort is made to eliminate verbal directions that might not be understood by a child with a language disability or limited English proficiency. Teachers may eliminate from the conference report any items that cannot be fairly assessed because of the child's language abilities.

### **Use of Assessment Results**

Results of ELC assessments are primarily used to shape the current year's program planning and to discuss individual children's developmental progress with parents so that we can work together to best support each child's growth.

In addition, the group results impact the school's quality improvement process via each teaching team's annual evaluation and the whole school annual evaluation, both of which are conducted in May in preparation for enhancements implemented for the next school year (10.B.07, 10.F.01). As a Keystone STAR 4 center, the ELC will report child/program demographics and child outcome data on children in our childcare program through the PA Early Learning Network (ELN). Only aggregate information, which does not allow for the identification of specific children, will be reported to the Commonwealth in October and May of each year for the purpose of improving the quality of childcare in PA.

### **Confidentiality (4.E.07)**

Because the staff at the ELC works as a team, often times each adult knows and interacts with every child. Therefore, all observations and other assessment data may be shared with all staff members. Information about family situations, special needs, and other sensitive issues is shared only on an as needed basis. Student teachers, assistants, volunteers, and other adults working within the school are only informed of such sensitive issues when they are a part of keeping the child safe, supporting the child's inclusion, or when the information might impact their coursework. All regular staff members sign the following college confidentiality agreement:

"In the normal course of business, many College employees will have occasion to maintain or come in contact with confidential records relative to applicants, students, parents, donors, other employees, vendors, etc. Employees are expected to practice discretion and care in discussing confidential matters and must observe confidentiality standards specific to information maintained within the employee's work area. Employees are prohibited from disclosing confidential information to other employees or students except for those employees who have a legitimate need-to-know. Any willful or intentional disclosure of confidential information to unauthorized persons will be considered a sufficient cause for discipline including possible termination of employment."

All College students involved at the ELC sign the following confidentiality policy statement:

"The Early Learning Center serves as an excellent educational tool for students, staff, and volunteers to learn about child development and behavior, as well as to strengthen overall knowledge of children. Parents of the Center know that their child may be exposed to many

adults, particularly students of the College. They also understand that some discussion of the children and the program will occur in College classes and in the proper content at the Center. It is important, however, that the family's rights to privacy are protected. College students who visit or participate in programs of the Early Learning Center, must refrain from discussing individual children and incidents, except as necessary in specific College classes. Children and incidents may not be discussed in the dormitory, at home, in other schools, in the community, or in any other inappropriate setting. Keep in mind that respect for each child as an individual and their family is expected from all participants, observers, volunteers, and staff. Thank you for observing this important policy."

In accordance with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) guidelines, official written records for each child are kept in files in a locked cabinet in the ELC office and released only to the individuals working with a child, as described above, or those for whom parents sign a written release (5.A.01,7.C.08). These files include enrollment forms, final conference reports, health assessments provided by physicians, results of developmental screenings conducted at school after parent authorization, reports of diagnostic assessments released to the school by parents, individual education plans, etc. Staff documentation of children's behavior and development, including specialized records for children whose special circumstances require extra classroom documentation are kept in classroom locations accessible to teachers but out of the reach of children and out of sight of classroom visitors. In addition, student researchers follow ethical standards with respect to confidentiality of individual data as described above.

## **Programs Offered**

### **Family Grouping Room (6 weeks-2 years 9 months)**

In this room, children from 6 weeks to age 2 years 9 months are nurtured in a multi-age setting. The children benefit from the continuity of care provided by the co-teachers and the opportunity to play and interact with children of varying ages. Messiah College student assistants and volunteers support teachers throughout the day.

Infants are accepted at the Early Learning Center after six weeks of age. Nurturing interactions with the infants and toddlers are the main focus of this group. They are held, sung to, read to, talked with, and played with throughout the day by qualified staff. Fresh air and daily walks occur on the surrounding campus sidewalks and grounds, weather permitting. Each child's feeding and sleeping schedule is designed in accordance with their home schedule. Upon arrival, each child is signed in by a parent or guardian and a daily individual schedule is started by the parent indicating the child's last diapering, feeding, and sleeping time. This sheet is updated throughout the day by the co-teachers, with any additional comments, and returned to the parent upon pick-up of the child.

In this multi-age classroom, children are full of curiosity, mobility, and energy, and primarily learn by "doing" with their whole mind and body. Due to this fact, active exploration is facilitated and encouraged. Our staff model appropriate behaviors through verbal and physical interactions to help guide children toward self-control and independence. Daily activities are planned for this group through implementing the project approach. Activities are focused on an area of interest and are aligned with the PA Early Learning Standards for Infants and Toddlers. Simple sign language is taught and used to communicate before language skills are developed. The schedules in the Family Grouping room are flexible and spontaneous, with teachers taking cues from the children's needs in order to plan or modify the day's events. While flexibility and spontaneity are important, it is also important to establish a routine for young children. This helps children further their understanding of themselves and others as well as provides them with a feeling of security.

Toilet training is a major milestone and will not occur at the Center until it has started at your home. Every effort will be made to work together in this interest, but it will not be made a part of the programming until the parents and Center staff agree that it is time to start. This typically begins around age 2 1/2. For more information on toilet training, please discuss this with your child's teacher.

Please send the following **labeled** items in with your child:

1. Items to remain in your child's personalized cubbie in the Family Grouping room:
    - One complete set of extra clothes, including socks and shoes
    - Crib-sized sheet and blanket, which is taken home for washing at the end of each week
    - Diapering supplies (only disposable diapers, except for documented medical reasons, and diaper cream)
    - Pacifiers, a lovey & a hair comb, if desired
  2. Items to remain in the Family Grouping room :
    - Snack items for the babies; snacks for the older children are provided
    - One labeled sipper cup
    - Bibs (we prefer vinyl, for ease of cleaning)
    - A family picture for our family wall
    - Sunscreen in the summer
  3. Items to bring daily:
    - Formula and bottles
    - Lunch in a labeled lunch box or bag
- \*Please note that bottles will be hand washed daily, but sent home weekly for the dishwasher.

Please do not leave diaper bags in the classroom. The state regulations require that diaper bags be inaccessible to children and we do not have adequate space for storage. This is a safety precaution since diaper bags may contain inappropriate items for young children.

### **Extended Care Room (2 years 9 months - 5 years)**

Children ages 2 years 9 months through age 5 are provided with care and learning opportunities in our Extended Care room before and after the morning Lab School program and all day when Lab School is not in session. As in the Family Grouping room, the teachers are supported by College student assistants and volunteers.

We believe multi-age grouping provides a wonderful and natural opportunity for children to learn by doing, observing, and teaching one another under the guidance and care of skillfully trained teachers. Our Extended Care program provides children with hands-on activities and experiences across all areas of development and learning. There are many self-selected and teacher-directed activities from which each child may choose. These include pre-literacy activities, science and math exploration and manipulatives, various art and music activities, fine motor and large motor activities, small and large group lesson times, and computers. Outside play is an important part of the planned activities for each day. A rest time is planned each afternoon for children to nap, or participate in quiet activities on their rest mat.

Please send in the following **labeled** items in each day or week with your child:

- sheet, blanket & pillow for rest mat
- favorite nap time security item, if needed
- one change of clothes (including socks and underwear)

- ☑ disposable diapers & wipes (diaper cream if needed)
- ☑ sweater/jacket for outdoor time (hat and gloves in winter)
- ☑ sun screen during summer months
- ☑ bookbag/totebag
- ☑ lunch in labeled container/bag
- ☑ a family picture for our family wall

Movement from the Family Grouping room to the Extended Care room is dependent on the child's age and developmental level and will occur at three times during the year. Transitions will be made at the beginning of either the fall or spring semester or the beginning of summer. With any change of classroom teacher and environment, our focus is to help ensure a smooth transition for both the child who is moving up and the children who will welcome him or her to their room. The age ranges listed in the previous sections for each classroom are simply guides; teachers, the Center Director, and parents will confer on a child's developmental readiness, age, and the classroom dynamics when determining the best time for a move.

### **Lab School Program (2 years 9 months - 5 years)**

The multi-age Lab School Program is a half-day preschool program, licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and operates during the academic year. Children enrolled in Extended Care attend Lab School Monday through Thursday mornings during the academic year. Each classroom is directed by a Master teacher, who is assisted by student teachers completing their ECE coursework.

Children enrolled in the Lab School range in age from 2 years 9 months to 5 years. A typical class includes 16 – 20 children with a ratio of one teacher to every five to seven children. Programming is offered Monday through Thursday, with two morning sessions and one afternoon session. Children are enrolled in either a four-day or two-day per week option. The two-day per week option includes Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday. The morning sessions meet from 8:45–11:30, and the afternoon session is held from 1:00–3:45.

The Lab school calendar follows the Messiah College academic year. Each semester consists of approximately 50 school days. The first semester begins in early September and ends mid-December. The second semester begins with a 2 week January term and ends by mid-May. A two week break occurs between the end of J-term session and the start of spring semester.

Each semester, Messiah College senior students completing Early Childhood Education certification requirements assist and teach in the classroom with and under the supervision of the Master teachers and Director.

## **Orientation for Children (10.B.08)**

The entry process is carefully planned to make the children's first days of school/childcare as reassuring as possible. The child's first ELC experience is a "getting to know you" visit with the parent to become familiar with the space, the teacher, and to begin to meet other members of the school community. The Lab school program begins with an Open House, where children come with their family members to become familiar with their specific classroom, meet the teachers, and meet their classmates.

Once the regular schedule begins and throughout the year, it is important for the children to arrive promptly so that they can participate fully in the day's activities. The start of the day often affects the child's whole experience. Being picked up on time is equally important. Young children need the security of knowing that they, too, will be picked up when the other children are going home.

For this and reasons related to staffing, picking up your child on time is essential. Please send a written note with your child to inform the teacher of changes in your dismissal arrangements. Children will not be allowed to leave the school with unauthorized adults.

## **Interaction Guidelines (7A.01)**

Early Learning Center staff members follow the ethical principles of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (6.A.01). We share the following core values as guides for interactions among staff members, between staff and children, between staff and parents, between staff and college students and college employees, etc.

- We strive to respect each individual and work to create a positive emotional climate for all learners, with sensitivity to differences in age, ability, background, language, culture, religion, and family structure.
- We use direct eye contact, smiles, warm tones of voice, positive touch, social conversations, and joint laughter to support the development of effective working relationships.
- Our partnership in learning is supported by regular, reciprocal communication, affirming recognition of effort and accomplishment, predictable, developmentally appropriate responsiveness to initiative, emotion, and concerns, and proactive conflict resolution.
- We are committed to reaching out to people of different races, genders, ethnicity, and ability, and we strive to create an environment of inclusion that celebrates our differences and highlights our commonalities (3.F.03). Our program accepts children with special needs as long as a safe, supportive environment can be provided for the child consistent with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (9.C.03).

## **Parents as Partners (7.A)**

The ELC offers adult family members and other caregivers a variety of ways to become involved in the child's school community, to participate in family activities, and to confer with the staff to build a strong bond between home and school (7.A.09). During the year, each teacher meets with parents to share information about the child's school and home life. Regular communication is encouraged among families, caregivers, and the school staff so that multiple perspectives on the child's development and interests can be used to enhance the child's school experience. In addition to the detailed family handbook and easily navigable web site, we have scheduled parent meetings and conferences, regular whole school and classroom newsletters, and frequent spontaneous interaction (7.B.01). A family bulletin board in the hallway outside the school office provides duplicate information, extra copies of forms, interesting articles, flyers about local family events and resources, and other parent resources (7.C.05, 8.B.03). Finally, the ELC provides reminders and other tips for families via email.

If any parents would benefit from translation services at conferences or for key documents, we can contact the Multicultural Programs Office for assistance in finding a translator who is fluent in the relevant language (7.A.02, 7.B.02).

Adult family members can use the one-way-mirror facilities at any time or schedule classroom visits to observe their child in the program (7.A.11). Please register in the office immediately upon entering the school. Headsets can be located on the bookcase inside the office to the right. Please sign out the headsets on the sheet provided. If you want to talk with a teacher, please contact the teacher to schedule a mutually agreeable meeting time. All parents are welcome to observe their children in the outdoor playground from outside the playground fence.

These popular family events include Open House, the Fall Harvest Party, Make It- Take It Day, the Christmas Party, Family Fun Night, the Art Show, and the Family Picnic. These events offer the whole family a chance to participate in the child's school experience. In addition, many adult family members extend their involvement by volunteering in school wide and/or classroom activities.

Another opportunity for volunteering is through the Parent Council. The purpose of the Parent Council is to provide parent representation to the ELC administration, offering feedback and suggestions to advise and support the administration on a variety of issues, and to strengthen and enhance the overall experience for children attending the ELC. The Parent Council meets 4-6 times a year and represents all the groups of children attending the ELC. Council members will be invited to serve for a one-year term. In the past, the Parent Council has been responsible for planning a family event in January, helping with other special events, and fundraising efforts for new materials and equipment. (7.A.12-14)

If you have questions or have experienced a problem at home or school, please approach the child's teacher or the director directly (7.C.). Recent potty-training efforts, changes in care-giving arrangements, the death of a pet, an extended absence of a parent, etc. can all cause changes in a child's demeanor and behavior at school, so timely communication helps the staff respond most effectively to the child. We make every effort to dialogue with children and families in a positive manner to plan strategies, resolve issues, and provide assistance in a timely and effective manner (3.F.03). Please also feel free to suggest ways that we can strengthen our partnership with you as together we seek to provide a high-quality learning environment for everyone in our school community.

All adult family members are invited to participate in the Early Learning Center's annual program evaluation via a survey conducted in May (10.F.04), as well as to contribute to our continuous quality improvement via Parents Council and fundraising efforts. Evaluation results, plans and opportunities are highlighted in the parent orientation meeting held prior to the school year (10.F.02) and updated as necessary via our newsletters.

## **Approach to Discipline: Positive Guidance (1.E., 1.F.)**

As with other areas of development, discipline is viewed as an individual growth process and learning opportunity. Our staff's primary goals are to help keep all children safe from harm, to help teach them respect for their and others' belongings, and to guide each child toward a positive sense of self and others. Teachers will set logical limits for children by explaining and modeling those limits as well as by working with each child to achieve self control and responsibility in a natural way. Our teachers also carefully monitor the children's activities to anticipate and diffuse problems before they occur. A child who is losing interest in one activity or getting too loud may be redirected to another area that can spark renewed engagement and positive behavior.

If a child has a conflict with others, they will be encouraged to verbalize their anger or concerns, talk through the problem, and try to find a reasonable solution. Our staff will, at all times, do their best to be consistent, patient, and firm when helping a child in this learning process. It is our belief that when a child learns over time that the expectations for behavior and action are reasonable and consistent, they develop a sense of security, stability, and trust between themselves and their caregivers. This holds true for even the youngest children. When an infant without verbal skills hears their caregiver describing a problem and talking through the solution, they begin to understand logical solutions.

This approach includes positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior, redirection, reminders of classroom rules, modifications of the classroom environment and /or daily schedule, and providing a supervised quiet time for the child to regain control. After a quiet time, the teacher invites the child to rejoin the group and reminds the child of the relevant expectations for the activity in progress.

Staff will observe all children and document any problem behavior to help ascertain any patterns, re: events, activities, and interactions, as well as any precipitating contextual factors. Only in extreme circumstances (i.e., when a child is emotionally out of control or presents a threat to other children) will the child be separated from the situation in order to regain self-control. Such situations are rare at the ELC and are discussed thoroughly with the child, the teacher, and the parent to determine positive steps toward solution. Under no circumstances will any child be physically punished, or verbally shamed, humiliated, or frightened. (1.B.09) If a child engages in aggressive behavior in a persistent manner, the parents, teachers and director will meet with an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant to discuss the situation which may be linked to developmental issues, and to create a plan that encourages consistency between home and the Center, with the goal being to support the child's successful inclusion in the classroom. A hierarchy of responses to challenging behaviors that threaten the safety of children and /or adults is available in the office.

### **Prohibited Behavior and Reporting Child Abuse (10.D.03-04)**

If any staff member or person from the child's family, while in the vicinity of the ELC, engages in a practice prohibited by the program, the director will take necessary steps to assure that there is no reoccurrence of the practice.

- Corporal or any type of physical punishment is not permitted. This includes hitting, spanking, beating, shaking, pinching, or other measures that produce physical pain.
- Withdrawal or the threat of withdrawal of food, rest, or bathroom opportunities is not permitted.
- Abusive, profane or derogatory language, including yelling and belittling, is not permitted.
- Any form of public or private humiliation, including threats of physical punishment, is not permitted.
- Any form of emotional abuse, including rejecting, terrorizing, isolating, or corrupting a child is not permitted.

All observations or suspicions of child abuse or neglect will be immediately reported to the child protective services agency no matter where the abuse might have occurred. The director will call ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313 and/or the Cumberland County CYS at 1-888-697-0371, ext. 6120, to report suspected abuse or neglect. The director will follow the direction of the child protective services agency regarding completion of written reports. If the parent or legal guardian of the child is suspected of abuse, the director will follow the guidance of the child protective agency regarding notification of the parent or legal guardian.

A staff member who is accused of child abuse may be suspended immediately or given leave without pay pending investigation of the accusation. Parents or legal guardians of suspected abused children will be notified. Parents or legal guardians of other children in the program will be contacted by the director if a caregiver is suspected of abuse so that they may share any concerns they have had. However, no accusation or affirmation of guilt will be made until the investigation is complete. Caregivers found guilty of child abuse will be summarily dismissed or relieved of their duties.

## **Yearly Calendar**

The Early Learning Center is open Monday-Friday from 7:30 a.m.- 5:30 p.m., 12 months a year with the exception of the following days:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Day
- Good Friday

- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Thanksgiving Day and the Friday following Thanksgiving
- Christmas Day
- The week between Christmas and New Year's Day
- 2 full day closings for staff in-service training
- 2 half day closings for staff in-service training

The Lab school program follows the Messiah College academic year. Calendars will be provided with the actual dates the Lab school is in session and the dates of when the Center is closed each year. If you did not receive one, please pick one up from the office, or download from the web site. Please make a personal note of these days so you will have adequate time to find alternate childcare if necessary.

**Please also note that a full week of childcare tuition will be charged for any week where a holiday or in-service day occurs, with the exception of the week between Christmas and New Year's Day.**

## **Health Issues (9.C.08, 10.D.01)**

At the Early Learning Center, your child's health and safety is our first priority, therefore we work with parents to promote and maintain healthy children. Each individual's vigilance regarding health and safety issues contributes significantly to our effectiveness. Always assume that you are the only one who notices a problem or potential problem and bring it to the attention of a staff person.

## **Staff Responsibility**

Staff members are responsible for maintaining a healthful environment (5.C.01-05). We begin with our own health by submitting health appraisals and following the same illness exclusions as those required for children. All staff members submit criminal record and child abuse clearances as part of the employment process. In addition, all staff members are certified in APA pediatric first aid / CPR training (5.A.03), fire safety class, and review of our emergency procedures. Each classroom has a well-equipped first aid kit, as does the playground (9.C.10). Each teacher has a backpack with basic first aid and emergency information that is used for all field trips, as well as additional supplies for emergency situations. We practice an emergency evacuation drills specified in our Emergency Action Plan (10.D.08) in a serious but non-dramatic fashion with the children at a rate of one per month. The assistant director also conducts a monthly health and safety check of the entire facility and works with staff and college personnel to rectify any hazards identified. Staff members are responsible for daily checks of their classrooms and shared spaces for hazards such as missing safety covers on outlets, elevated water temperature in the bathrooms, and hazards on the playground, etc.

Messiah College is a smoke-free environment (9.D.06) with a safe water supply from United Water Pennsylvania (9.D.02) and heating, ventilation, and cooling systems maintained in accordance with national standards (9.D.05). ECH Associates, an environmental consultant company, has performed lead, radon and asbestos screenings in the basement of Hostetter Chapel. Lead hazards and high levels of radon were not detected, and an AHERA Asbestos-Containing Materials Management Plan has been implemented and will be followed by Messiah College's Environmental Health and Safety Department to conduct periodic surveillance and asbestos abatement if and when necessary. Messiah College does periodic checks for additional environmental hazards, and uses an integrated pest management program (9.D.08). [Overall 10.D.02]

With the help of the college Campus Maintenance staff, we follow NAEYC's frequency table for cleaning and sanitation throughout the school, including toys and water play areas (5.C.01,03,10). All staff members follow standard precautions to minimize spread of infectious disease (5.C.02) and store hazardous materials in locked cabinets. We follow parent and/or health professional recommendations

regarding children who have allergies (5.C.05). We use the Weather.net to determine safe temperatures for outdoor play, as well as subscribing to an air quality alert system that provides notices of hazards in our area (5.A.07, 9.D.03). When children enrolled in childcare are outside for a longer time and wearing bathing suits, we apply will apply sunblock with a minimum UVB and UVA protection of SPF 15 if it is authorized in writing and provided by the family (5.A.07). At this time, our area is not designated by health authorities as high-risk of insect-borne disease; but if that changes, we will use daily application of repellent containing DEET when parents provide written authorization and appropriate repellent (5.A.07).

Because hand washing is the #1 preventive measure to avoid the spread of disease (5.A.09), we explicitly teach, scaffold, and monitor hand-washing procedures that involve the use of liquid soap and running water, with vigorous and thorough rubbing for at least 10 seconds (the length of the alphabet song), followed by paper towel drying and faucet contact. We and the children wash our hands upon entry, before snacks and meals, before and after food preparation, after toileting and diapering, after contact with bodily fluids, after play in the water table, and after re-entry from the playground, as well as after any messy activities or contact with pets. Adults also wash their hands after assisting with toileting, handling garbage or cleaning, and before and after feeding a child or administering medication.

The ELC contracts with PA Association for the Blind to provide vision screening annually (4.C.01). Participation in this optional service requires permission from a parent or guardian.

### **Staffing & Supervision**

Children are supervised at all times (3.C.02, 3.C.04) We maintain required staff:child ratios at all times and better ratios most of the time (10.B.12).

Minimum of 1:4 for Family Grouping classroom

Minimum of 1:6 for Extended Care with 2 year olds

Minimum of 1:10 for Lab School Programs

(although we aim for 1:6 with student support)

These ratios are applicable both indoors and outdoors.

At any time when children are present in the school, there are at least two adults present, at least one of which is a staff member (i.e., the other could be a student employee or intern). Staff members, as a group, supervise preschool children primarily by sight and supervise infants/toddlers by sight and sound.(3.C.04).

The Early Learning Center employs a full-time assistant teacher who is assigned to all of the classes and age groups, and is familiar with the children and the routines in each classroom and can effectively substitute when a teacher is absent (10.B.11,13). In addition to the full time assistant teacher, we recruit additional substitutes with early childhood training and /or experience with young children. We invite these individuals to have regular contact with the school and to participate in several of our staff development events to maintain their familiarity over the years. All substitutes must attend the fire/emergency safety training and be certified in pediatric first aid.

### **Illness and Injury (5.A.04)**

Staff members greet children at the beginning of the day, being watchful of their appearance as they enter and throughout the day. Children who become sick at school are removed from the group and cared for until parents can be contacted to come for the child.

Young children often experience falls or bumps during the course of a day, especially in the outdoor classroom. Usually, they do not result in injury and are handled with simple comfort, a drink of water,

or a sympathetic bandaid or ice pack (i.e., not necessary but yet comforting). When children sustain a cut, bruise, or other injury, staff members will provide treatment according to procedures specified in our pediatric first aid training (10.D.09). They will verbally report the injury to parents, guardians or caregivers, recommend treatment by a medical professional if appropriate, and complete an injury report within one day. Copies are kept in a central office file, the child's file, and given to the family. Parents or guardians will be notified immediately in case of a more serious accident and prompt action will be taken by contacting Messiah College Public Safety. If necessary, we will accompany the child to the hospital preferred by the family, either in a campus security vehicle or ambulance. In these cases, injury reports are supplemented by the EMS reports.

### **Family Responsibility**

As part of the enrollment process, each family must complete an emergency contact information form and give permission for staff members to administer basic first aid to their child and to contact Messiah College Public Safety for more advanced care. Review of this emergency information is required every semester. In addition, parents or guardians should contact the school any time there is a change in the emergency contact information. Additional consent forms for field trips, multimedia recording, swimming pool use, and sunscreen application are also required.

Prior to the child's first day of school, parents are required to submit a current health assessment of the child (5.A.11), including either proof of the recommended immunizations or a signed statement indicating that the family has objections to immunization. If the child isn't due to receive a health assessment until shortly after his or her start date, parents may provide evidence of an upcoming appointment in the form of a copy of the appointment card or note written on physician's office letterhead. Thereafter, parents must submit an updated form after the yearly well-child checkup (10.D.05). Parents of children speaking English as a second language are asked to complete a form detailing the children's level of proficiency and then invited to dialogue with teachers regarding strategies to assist the child's transition as necessary (7.A.02, 08). Parents of children with allergies must complete an additional form giving guidelines appropriate to the child's needs, with detail regarding provision and storage of special foods (labeled with the child's name and date), necessary adaptations of activities or environment, responses staff should take in the event of an allergic reaction, and any necessary staff training (5.C.04, 9.D.07). Parents of children with other special needs should contact the director for guidance regarding necessary documentation and advance planning with the staff. All special needs must be fully documented and explained to the director and your child's teacher.

### **Health Appraisals (5.A.01)**

Every child must have a current documented health appraisal on file at the Center. Health Assessment forms are available in the office. These assessments must be conducted by a physician or CRNP and must include either proof of the recommended immunizations or a signed statement indicating that the family has objections to immunization. Thereafter, families must submit an updated form after the yearly well-child check-up. (10.D.05)

Forms are to be updated at the following ages:

- 2 months     4 months     6 months     9 months     12 months     15 months  
 18 months     24 months     3 years     4 years

### **Safe Sleep Policy (5.A.12)**

The following guidelines are followed to reduce SIDS risk factors, as suggested by the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- Sleeping children will be monitored.
- Babies are always put to sleep on their backs. Babies who can turn over are allowed to adopt whatever position they prefer.
- A physician's note is required for non-back sleepers. A copy will be kept in the child's file and a copy posted on the child's crib.
- Pillows, quilts, comforters, sheepskins, toys and other soft items will not be used in cribs for infants younger than eight months. The infant's head will remain uncovered during sleep.
- If a blanket is used, the infant is placed at the foot of the crib with the blanket tucked around the crib mattress, reaching only as far as the infant's chest.

### **Ill Children (5.A.04)**

We want to provide a learning environment that fosters safety and well-being. There are several reasons for a sick child to be excluded from a classroom setting. The first is to prevent the spread of any communicable disease or infection to other children or teachers. Another reason is to ensure that the child receives adequate rest and attention. Therefore please do not bring your child to the Early Learning Center if:

- ✓ your child has a fever of 101 degrees orally, or 100 degree axillary (armpit) or higher, and the fever is associated with behaviors change and other signs of illness. These signs are anything (other than the fever) that indicates that the child's condition is different from what is usual when the child is healthy,
- ✓ your child has an unexplained rash,
- ✓ your child has persistent diarrhea (caused by *E coli* O157:H7, diarrhea not contained in the diaper, or diarrhea is causing "accidents" for toilet-trained children, or stool frequency exceeding 2 or more stools above normal for your child),
- ✓ your child has vomiting and fever or has vomited more than 2 times in 24 hours, or
- ✓ your child has a contagious disease or condition including, but not limited to:

chicken pox – may return when all blisters have scabbed, (usually 6 days after the start of rash)

lice or scabies – may return 24 hours after treatment is started and infestation is eliminated, as determined by the child's health professional

strep throat and scarlet fever – may return 24 hours after antibiotic is started

hand, foot, and mouth (coxsackievirus) – may return 24 hours after fever is gone.

If your child must stay home due to a contagious disease, please contact the office so that we may update our confidential illness log for reference by parents and staff.(5.A.05) If your child begins to exhibit symptoms of any illness or condition noted above, and is unable to participate in classroom activities and the director or assistant director determine that teachers cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the class, a staff

member will contact you immediately to pick up your child. If you cannot be reached, a person designated by you as an emergency contact will be called. Please be aware that tuition will not be reimbursed for days missed due to illness.

**If your child is sent home for illness, they must be kept home for the entire next day and be symptom free for a 24-hour period before being re-admitted.** Giving your child Tylenol or a fever reducer in the morning before coming to the Center is not acceptable and only temporarily masks symptoms. Please understand that this policy is in place to protect the health of all children enrolled.

We believe that daily outdoor play-time and exploration is a vital part of the early childhood program when weather permits (5.A.06). When your child is dropped off for care, it is assumed that they will be able to participate in all activities. If your child is unable to spend brief periods of time outdoors due to illness, we believe they are too ill to come to school. It is not possible for us to leave one child indoors while the rest of the class is outside.

### **Medication (5.A.11, 10.D.10)**

We encourage you to administer your child's medication before arriving at the Center if possible. However, if medication needs to be given at school, please notify the office and complete the medicine log form. Early Learning Center staff will administer medications to your child according to the following criteria:

- All medication must be in its original packaging.
- All medication must have written instructions for use on the packaging.
- In order for a child under two to be given non-prescription medication which states, "For children under two years of age consult a physician," a physician's directions, written on a prescription pad, must be given.
- All prescription medication must include the child's name on the label.
- Parents must indicate the following information on the medicine log located in the office: child's name, date, name of medication, dosage, times to be administered, need for refrigeration, parent's signature. Upon administering medication, staff will sign the medicine log.

If your child takes daily medication for a chronic condition, we will keep a separate medicine log expressly for your child. On this log, you would indicate all pertinent information and the period of time for which it is to be administered. You will need to update this personal log as your child's medical needs change. Upon daily administering of the medication, a staff member will sign that log. This option will eliminate the need for you to fill out a medicine log every day. You may discuss this further with your child's teacher.

For children with special health needs (including asthma and allergies), the health record on file must include an additional section from your child's physician, describing the chronic illness, what teachers need to watch for, and what to do for the child routinely and when the child has a problem.

### **Accidents/Injuries/Emergency Situations (10.D.08-09)**

Although every attempt is made to keep children safe, young children do suffer minor injuries. Tripping and stumbling are usually the main culprits, but occasionally another child is the cause of the injury. Children from 12-30 months are especially prone to shoving, hitting, and biting, as they are not yet cognizant of the consequences of their actions or fully able to handle situations in nonaggressive ways. Any time a child is significantly injured while at the Center, a staff member will complete an incident report, detailing the accident or injury, its treatment, and measures to avoid recurrence. Parents will be asked to sign the report, acknowledging their notification of the injury.

Upon a child's admission to the ELC, a parent must complete and sign an emergency contact/informed consent form. You will be contacted part way through the school year to conduct a period update of the form. If an emergency occurs, the child's parent will be contacted as soon as possible. A staff member will stay with the child at all times until a parent arrives. If necessary, emergency first aid/CPR will be administered with parental consent. You may discuss this further with your child's teacher.

The ELC Emergency Plan is in accordance with the Messiah College Emergency Operations Plan which provides for response to all types of emergencies. Plans are in place for evacuation to a separate on campus location or off campus location as warranted by college officials. In the event of a long term evacuation, we contact families as quickly as possible via phone to notify them of the plan for reuniting them with their children. Monthly evacuation drills are held at the Early Learning Center in order for staff and children to practice exiting the building in case of an emergency. A detailed emergency evacuation plan is posted in the office for your reference. The teachers are trained yearly in fire safety, emergency preparedness, and pediatric first aid.

In an emergency or time-crucial situation when the director is not present or reachable by phone, the assistant director serves as the acting director. If neither the director nor the assistant director is present at the time of an emergency, the administrative assistant and the most senior teacher present decide collaboratively on a course of action.

### **Snacks and Meals (5.B.15)**

Providing children with nutritious meals and snacks is very important and we want to work together with you to help your child develop healthy eating habits. Socialization is emphasized as children eat snacks in small groups with their teachers. In all programs, the Early Learning Center will provide nutritious morning and afternoon snacks, with 100% fruit juice, milk, or water available whenever the child is thirsty throughout the day. The snack menu is posted on classroom refrigerators and in the Lab school newsletters. (5.B.15) In addition, for children in the Family Grouping room, please send in one labeled sippy cup if your child uses them. Parents of infants are responsible for bringing all their child's nutritional needs, including formula and baby food, in labeled containers. Parents of all children in childcare are responsible to bring their child's daily lunch. Please send balanced meals in appropriate quantities for your child. Each room has access to a refrigerator and microwave to store and prepare meals. Please be sure all containers are labeled and brought in a paper bag or other container with a label. The ELC reserves the right to label any unlabeled items brought from home. When preparing your child's lunch or other daily nutritional needs, please remember that we cannot save and serve for a second time food or drink from a container (including sippy cups and bottles) from which your child has eaten or drank. Upon arrival at the Center in the morning, your child's lunch bag should be placed in the classroom refrigerator.

### **Holidays and Birthdays**

At the ELC holidays are viewed as educational opportunities that give us the chance to learn about our diverse school community (3.F.03). As part of our emphasis on family identity and respect for diversity, we encourage children to talk about their family traditions, and we share stories related to the meaning of holidays. We plan age-appropriate activities to involve the children in preparing for simple school celebrations and to help them contribute to family events (e.g., basic cooking, making gifts, and so forth). We limit our school celebrations to very brief spans of time (typically one day), attempt to maintain our regular school routine. Because the children may prepare their own special snack related to holidays and because many children have dietary restrictions (especially related to candy and other sweets), **please consult the teachers before sending any food as gifts for children**. In all of these

ways, we can create meaningful celebrations with the young children in our educational context. Birthday celebrations for young children at school can be a special time for the child to share with friends at school and when possible, for families to join the celebration. Please contact your child's teacher when your child's birthday is approaching, in order to plan the timing of the celebration to best fit your schedule. When appropriate, you may feel free to send along a special snack or birthday treat. If you wish to do this, we ask that you speak with your child's teacher several days in advance and ask about any food allergies within the classroom. In the Lab school classrooms, summer birthdays are generally celebrated during the last week of school. If you plan an additional birthday celebration outside of school time, please mail invitations from home unless the entire class is invited.

## **Tuition Policies**

### **Registration Fees**

A non-refundable registration fee of \$40.00 will be charged each year for each child enrolling. This fee can be paid with confirmation from us that a space is available for your child. At this time, enrollment paperwork will also be provided for you to complete prior to your child's attendance. Please do not send the registration fee until we have informed you that space is available.

### **Payment Schedule**

Payments are to be made at the Early Learning Center office once a month for the upcoming month of care. Payment can be made either the first business day of each month or the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month depending on your personal preference. Checks may be made out to the **Early Learning Center** and dropped off at the office with the administrative assistant or in the locked box near the office door. A \$25.00 fee will be charged for any returned check.

### **Late Payment Fee**

A grace period of one week will be granted for late tuition payments. On the Friday ending that week, a late fee of \$25.00 will be added to your bill if the payment is not received. If late payments become a consistent problem, a payment plan can be arranged to assist you. If it is still a problem, your child may be withdrawn from enrollment and no longer offered services.

### **Discounts**

When siblings are enrolled, a 5% discount will be deducted from the oldest child's tuition rate.

### **Late Pick-up Fee & Policy**

When picking up children in childcare, please make every effort to be at the Center by 5:15 p.m. so that you are able to talk with your child's teacher and gather his or her belongings by the 5:30 p.m. closing time (10.D.06). If you know you will be later than 5:30 p.m., please call the classroom to alert the staff. If you are not at the Center by 5:30 p.m. an initial \$5.00 late fee will be charged. At 5:35 p.m., we will call you and/or your emergency contact person to pick up your child if you have not given the Center notice of your delay. Beginning at 5:35 p.m. an additional \$5.00 will be charged for each subsequent five-minute interval.

### **Withdrawal Notice**

Notice of a child's withdrawal from the Early Learning Center must be made in writing to the Center director at least two weeks in advance. Tuition is required for these two weeks, even if the child is not in attendance.

# **General Policies & Procedures**

## **Enrollment**

Applications for enrollment are accepted at any time. If no openings are available, applications will automatically be added to the waiting list. First priority for enrollment is given to Messiah College employees, College alumni, and siblings of previous or currently enrolled children. Other vacancies will then be offered to those who have applied according to the date the application was first received, considering a reasonable balance of ages and schedule requests. The Childcare program's minimum enrollment is two full days per week. Minimum enrollment for the Lab school is two half-days per week.

Prior to enrollment, parents and children are scheduled to visit the Center to gain an understanding of the program and to meet the staff. In order to comply with the Department of Public Welfare, each child's file must include a completed Emergency Contact/ Parental Consent Form, an Agreement, and a Child Health Assessment before a child may be officially enrolled. These forms may be obtained from the Early Learning Center office.

In the event that the full day, Extended Care classroom has openings for children after the start of each semester, families of children enrolled in the half-day Lab School Program may register their child for full day care on a first come, first served basis. In this instance, community enrollment for childcare will be on a semester-to-semester basis, until the classroom opening is filled by a Messiah College employee or student family. Full day childcare rates will apply, and children will need to be enrolled on a regular established schedule.

## **Trial Period**

This three-month period is an initial time for parents, children, and staff to get acquainted and to determine if the child's needs are being met. It is our goal to do our very best to serve you and your child. This time exists to mutually determine if the child would be better served in a different setting. If at any point during your child's tenure at the Early Learning Center serious concerns arise concerning his or her suitability for a childcare setting, teachers and/or administrative personnel will work with you and your child towards a developmentally appropriate solution.

## **Termination Policy**

The Early Learning Center may terminate the enrollment and enforce the withdrawal of any child at any time due to delinquent payment, ill health, consistent behavior problems without requested intervention by the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants, and any other problems in accordance with the ELC Program handbook.

## **Grievance Policy and Procedures**

We encourage our staff and parents to practice what we encourage children to do: to talk through conflicts with the person directly involved. If further action is necessary, then go to that person's supervisor. If this is still not satisfactory, please bring your concern to the director. The director reports to the dean of the School of Education and Social Science at Messiah College.

## **Periodic Records Review**

State regulations require that the Emergency Contact/Parental Consent Form and the Agreement be reviewed and updated every six months or as changes occur. In order to comply with these regulations

and to keep the lines of communication open, please contact the office with any changes in family, medical, or contact information as soon as possible to update your child's file. If your child's enrollment changes, we will update your Agreement to have you sign and review it. Your child's most recent Health Assessment (following the schedule on page 7) needs to be brought in as soon after their scheduled appointment as possible. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated in helping to maintain our records for your child.

### **Inclement Weather**

As part of the Messiah College community, we follow the College's decisions regarding cancellations, delayed openings, and early dismissals in response to weather conditions and other emergencies. When the decision has been made to alter the College's schedule, the Center's hours are adjusted accordingly. If the decision is made to close early, your child's teacher or office personnel will contact you. If you cannot be reached, we will call your emergency contact person. The most current weather-related information is announced on the campus emergency information line at 691-6084. Information specific to the Early Learning Center will be recorded on the office voice mailbox at 796-5043 and the director's voice mailbox at 691-6085. Please check one of these numbers in addition to the College hotline.

### **Transportation & Field Trips**

Daily transportation is not provided for children enrolled in the Early Learning Center. However, with parental permission the classes will occasionally plan an off-campus field trip using College vans as the primary means of transportation. Written notice of such trips will be provided in advance with a permission slip indicating parental consent. Parents must provide labeled, approved child safety seats the day of the trip and secure the car seat in the labeled Messiah College van (9.C.15). The children are assigned in advance to specific adults for field trips. Parents are always welcome to accompany us on field trips; however, you may need to provide your own transportation. Occasionally family members are recruited to drive for field trips because our teachers are not allowed to transport students in their vehicles (10.D.07). We are required to verify that all drivers have a valid license, as well as current car insurance.

### **Security System**

Adult family members will be issued access cards upon enrollment at the ELC. Messiah College employees and alumni will have access privileges added to their current I.D. card. Families may swipe their card to enter through the main door and the door by the library. Visitors without an access card for clearance must enter through the office. Please refrain from using the Handicap Access Button unless you are physically unable to open the door.

### **Clothing**

Your child should be dressed in comfortable clothing, suited to play activities as well as weather conditions. Occasionally, a child will soil his/her clothes while participating in an art project or experimenting at the water table. Be sure to keep a set of labeled, size and season appropriate clothing in your child's cubby or backpack at all times for such emergencies.

Daily outdoor time is planned 12 months a year. As the weather changes and grows cooler, please send your child in appropriate clothing and footwear. Our large playground is shaded, so providing clothes that can be layered for warmth is essential. (5.A.07). In the winter, send boots, gloves, hats and snow pants. Keep in mind that all removable clothing must be labeled. Labeling outerwear prevents our "lost

and found" box from overflowing!

### **Toys from Home**

The Early Learning Center has an ample supply of toys and materials. We ask that your child NOT bring in toys from home except on his/her sharing day. When your child brings a special toy from home to play with in the classroom, it often creates a distraction for the other children. In addition, the ELC teachers are not responsible for lost or broken toys brought from home.

### **Weapons policy**

The Early Learning Center does not allow toys or gestures representational of weapons or other implements of violence to be included in the activities of the children. No toy weapons (such as a toy gun, knife, sword), games or books of violence or any other objects of violence are permitted in the Center at any time. Any child or group of children engaging in the performance of fantasy violence or rough play against another child will be re-directed to a form of non-violent play.

Messiah College is a weapons-free site. No weapons are stored or allowed on campus. No visitor, volunteer, employee, child, or parent is permitted to bring a weapon to this site, except in the event of a police action involving the College, requiring authorities in the conduct of their duty to carry a weapon. Any violation to this policy at the ELC is subject to College review and incidents involving a child will be handled according to the hierarchy of responses to challenging behavior, available in the ELC office.

### **Housekeeping Issues**

Each child's lunch bag and leftovers must be taken home daily. Bedding will be used for one week if possible, and then returned home for laundering each Friday. In the case of an accident, bedding and clothes will be sent home that day to be laundered and returned the following day. You may also want to send in a photo of your family, a special security toy or blanket, etc. to make the transition between home and childcare easier.

### **Childcare Drop-off and Pick-up (10.D.06)**

Upon arrival, parents or guardians must accompany children into the classroom and assist them with washing their hands (5.A.09). A parent or guardian must also sign children in and out of the classroom each day. If staff members do not recognize a parent or guardian, they will ask to see identification before releasing a child. A child's parents or guardian must provide a list of adults to whom the child can be released. Parents can only be excluded when a court of competent jurisdiction has limited the parental right of access to the child and a copy of the order is on file at the ELC. If an adult other than a child's parent/guardian will be picking up the child, the Center must receive written permission from the child's parent/guardian and photo identification will be required.

If a child will be arriving more than fifteen minutes earlier than usual, or leaving more than fifteen minutes later than usual, advance notice is requested. This information is important for staffing purposes as well as classroom activities. Please make every effort to pick up your child by 5:15 p.m. to allow ample time for communication before the 5:30 p.m. closing time.

### **After-hours Care**

We realize that parents' work schedules sometimes necessitate after-hours care. If a staff member agrees to watch children of the Center, we prefer that our full-time teachers not watch children whom they directly teach or care for at the Center. Arrangements for after-hours care may not be made during

the staff member's workday and may not take place within the Early Learning Center facility. Additionally, a staff member may not be listed as a family's emergency contact person nor are they permitted to pick up or drop off children at the Center.

### **Classroom Scheduling**

Each classroom will have a daily schedule posted for parents to review. An activity plan or lesson plan will also be posted so parents can see what activities their child will be involved in during the week.

### **Home/School Communication**

Maintaining a strong bond between home and school is a vital part of any successful early childhood program, therefore daily notes will be sent home in the Family Grouping room, in addition to newsletters and notices for all programs on a regular basis. Parents of children attending both Lab School and Extended care will receive weekly email notes from the Lab School teachers. The Extended care teachers will write daily happenings on the classroom whiteboard. Please read this information carefully and share relevant information and upcoming events with your child.

Teachers and staff can be reached directly in their classrooms by dialing the College's automated line and the classroom's extension listed on the first page of this handbook. In addition, parent conferences will be scheduled throughout the year to discuss your child's growth experiences and any questions or concerns you or the staff may have.

### **Parent Involvement and Responsibilities**

Parents are encouraged to spend a few minutes at either drop-off or pick-up time to talk with the staff to relay important information or to hear about your child's day. Daily communication is essential in avoiding misunderstandings and unanswered questions. Parents are also invited to visit and spend time with their child at anytime. From time to time, there will be opportunities to participate in special events and programs as well. If a parent wishes to take a child to lunch or for a walk, they are encouraged to do so. We simply ask that you let us know of your plans that day in case we plan an activity outside the classroom. Any parent removing a child from our care needs to sign out on the classroom sheet, and upon return, sign the child back in.

As our program philosophy states, "We are committed to you as a family and will strive to work in partnership with you to meet the needs of your child. We believe and will respect the fact that parents are the child's first teachers and most significant providers of care and education in a child's life. We are honored to serve as an extension of that nurturing early care and education."