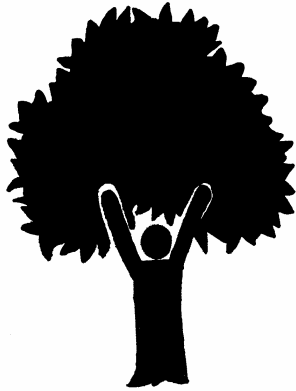


*Early Learning Center  
Lab School Program*



*Parent Handbook*

Early Learning Center  
Messiah College  
P.O. Box 3021  
One College Avenue  
Grantham, PA 17027  
(717)796-5043



**Early Learning Center  
Lab School Program**



**Important Phone Numbers**

- Early Learning Center Office/Administrative Assistant.....796-5043
- Center Director.....691-6085
- Lab School Classrooms.....796-1800 ext. 3961  
ext. 3962



Messiah College does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, color, age, disability, or national or ethnic origin.

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.

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# Welcome

Thank you for your interest in the Messiah College Early Learning Center Lab School Program. This handbook serves as a guide to the families enrolled or interested in enrolling in the Lab School. Statements of philosophy and goals are included as well as information about our daily schedule and activities. We value our relationship with parents and strive to develop open lines of communication between home and school. If you have questions or concerns that were not answered in this booklet, we invite you to call or set up an appointment with the Center Director or one of the Master Teachers for the Lab School at your convenience. We will do our best to work together to make your child's first school experience a positive one.



## Our Relationship to Messiah College

The Early Learning Center is located in the lower level of Hostetter Chapel on the campus of Messiah College. The Lab School Program was established in 1970 and serves as a site for Early Childhood training and education for the College. In 1999, Child Care was added to meet the needs of Messiah College faculty and staff. Both programs within the Early Learning Center exist to provide a model of high quality early childhood programming for children and their families.

## **Our 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.

## **Our Program Philosophy**

The Lab School Program is based on the belief that young children learn best through active play and exploration of their environment and positive collaborations with peers, in addition to the nurturing guidance and instruction of supportive adults. We provide a child-centered environment where a balance of structure and flexibility exists. We believe in providing for the development of the whole child; therefore, learning opportunities encourage social/emotional, physical, cognitive and language growth. Recognizing that each child develops on an individual basis with varying developmental needs, we plan activities to meet individual needs. This is accomplished through developmentally appropriate practices, which emphasize age appropriate activities, family grouping, and individualized instruction.

## **Our Program Description**

The Lab School Program is a traditional half-day nursery school program, licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and thus must meet PDE regulations. The Early Learning Center is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Children enrolled in the Lab School range in age from two years-nine months to five years. A typical class includes 16 – 21 children with a ratio of one teacher to every five to seven children. We offer programming 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.

Our school calendar follows the Messiah College academic year. Each semester consists of about 50 school days. The first semester begins in early September and ends about December 10. The second semester begins in January and ends by May 10.

## **Our Goals for Young Children**

The most important goal of the Lab School Program is to help children become well-rounded, enthusiastic, life-long learners. The activities we plan for children, the way we organize the environment, select toys and materials, plan the daily schedule, and talk with children are all designed to accomplish the following goals in all areas of development:

### **Social/Emotional Development**

- Achieving a sense of self through relationships with peers and adults.
- Taking responsibility for self and others in the classroom setting.
- Behaving in a pro-social way by showing empathy, sharing, and taking turns.

### **Physical Development**

- Achieving gross motor control by moving the large muscles in the body. Gross motor control includes balance and stability, running and jumping, and physical manipulations such as throwing and kicking.
- Achieving fine motor control by using and coordinating the small muscles in the hands and wrists. As these fine muscles develop, children are able to manipulate small objects such as scissors and writing tools.

### **Cognitive Development**

- Learning and problem solving by observing, questioning, predicting, testing, and forming conclusions. Thinking logically by gathering and making sense of information (sorting, comparing, contrasting, counting, etc.).
- Representing and thinking symbolically through dramatic play, using objects in unique ways, and drawing representations.



### **Language Development**

- Listening and speaking: communicating with others meaningfully through spoken language.
- Reading and writing: making sense of written language, understanding the purpose of print and how it works, gaining knowledge of the alphabet, and writing letters and words.

# Schedule

## A.M. Session

8:45 – 8:55 Songs  
8:55 – 9:10 Focus Lesson  
9:10 – 10:15 Free Choice  
10:15 –10:30 Sharing  
10:30 –10:45 Snack  
10:45 –11:00 Large/Small Group  
11:00 –11:25 Outside Play  
11:30 Dismissal

## P.M. Session

1:00 – 1:10 Songs  
1:10 – 1:25 Focus Lesson  
1:25 – 2:30 Free Choice  
2:30 – 2:45 Sharing  
2:45 – 3:00 Snack  
3:00 – 3:15 Large/Small Group  
3:15 – 3:40 Outside Play  
3:45 Dismissal

# Our Teachers and Staff

- The Early Learning Center Director is responsible for overseeing all programs within the Center and works directly with the Master Teachers of the Lab School Program to develop and maintain a high quality early childhood experience for young children, families, and college students in teacher preparation course work.
- The Master Teachers for the Lab School Program are certified in Early Childhood Education and serve as the Lead Teachers in the classroom, in addition to working with and guiding college students who are fulfilling field work or student teaching requirements.
- 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 Lead Teachers and Director.
- Students completing practicum and field experiences in Early Childhood and related fields of study will be involved in the classroom at various intervals throughout the semester.



# **General Policies and Procedures**

## **Payment of Tuition**

It is understood that all tuition must be paid in advance at the beginning of the month, or semester, and that all delinquent payments in excess of fifteen days could result in suspension of enrollment until fees are paid. Tuition for the semester can be broken into four installments to be paid at the beginning of each month. Any extenuating circumstances that interfere with payment should be discussed with the Center Director immediately.

## **Arrival and Dismissal**

It is extremely important for your child's feeling of security that he/she be dropped off and picked up promptly at the start and end of each session. Also, planning periods before and after the sessions are essential for the staff to provide your child with a quality experience.

### ***Arrival***

The front classroom door will be opened five minutes prior to the start of the session. If you arrive before the classroom is open, you are welcome to wait in the library with your child. A teacher will greet your child at the classroom door and collect any permission slips or other pertinent information concerning your child that day. Parents and caregivers are welcome to come into the classroom to help their child put his/her belongings in the child's cubbie. The observation window is then available for further observation.

### ***Dismissal***

At the end of each session, the classroom door will be opened for you to pick up your child. If you arrive early, please wait in the library or the hallway outside the classroom. Please enter and leave the classroom ONLY from the designated classroom door. A

teacher will be monitoring the door to insure that each child leaves with the appropriate adult. If you will be late picking up, please call the Center so that we can reassure your child. If an adult other than a child's parent will be picking up the child, or if an after school play date has been arranged with another child in the class, the Center must be notified in writing by a parent.

## **Parent Participation and Communication**

Parents are an essential part of our program at the Early Learning Center. We believe that parents are the first and most important teachers of their child. It is our goal to work together with parents to provide the best learning environment for each child.

We encourage parents to use the observation window to observe their child and to take advantage of the opportunities to be involved in the classroom throughout the year. The teachers will schedule individual conferences with parents at the beginning and end of each semester. Problems or concerns you may have at other times should be brought to the attention of the classroom teacher immediately.

Informative newsletters are sent home biweekly to inform parents of upcoming classroom activities and special events. Important information for parents can also be found on the parent bulletin boards located beside the classroom doors.

## **Attendance**

In order to provide a consistent experience for your child, it is important that he/she attend school regularly. On days your child is not able to attend, please notify the classroom teacher with a note or phone call.



## **Clothing**

Your child should be dressed in comfortable clothing, suited to play activities as well as weather conditions. If children are concerned about ruining their clothes, they will be hindered from experiencing wonderful opportunities for growth and exploration. There will be outdoor activity daily, except in extremely bad weather, so please bring your child with appropriate outerwear. Labeling outerwear will prevent our "lost and found" box from overflowing!

Occasionally, a child will soil his/her clothes at school. We have a limited supply of extra clothes, so we recommend keeping a change of clothing in your child's backpack for such emergencies.

## **Toys**

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. Your child will have a specified day to relate one experience or share one item from home with the class.

## **Cost**

The Early Learning Center Lab School Program offers a quality learning experience at very reasonable rates. For a cost that is little more than that of hiring a babysitter, we offer many opportunities for growth and development. Current school year tuition rates are available by contacting the Early Learning Center Office at 796-5043.

## **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. The most current weather related information is announced on the campus emergency information hotline at 691-6084. Information specific to the Lab School Program will be recorded on the ELC office voice mailboxes at 796-5043 and 691-6085.

## **Approach to Discipline: Positive Guidance**

As with other areas of development, discipline is viewed as an individual growth process and learning opportunity. Our teachers' primary goals are to 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.

If children have a conflict or problem, they will be encouraged to verbalize their anger or concerns, talk through the problem, and try to find a reasonable solution. Our teachers 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 children learn over time that the expectations for behavior and action are reasonable, they develop a sense of security, stability, and trust. 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 composure and think through the incident. Under no circumstances will any child be verbally shamed, humiliated, or frightened.

## Ill Children

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 Lab School if:

- ✓ your child has a fever of 100 degrees or higher,
- ✓ your child has an unexplained rash,
- ✓ your child has persistent diarrhea or vomiting, or
- ✓ your child has a contagious disease or condition including, but not limited to:

pink-eye (conjunctivitis) - until 24 hours after treatment is started if discharge is thick and yellow

chicken pox - until 6 days after the last blister appears

lice or scabies - until 24 hours after treatment is started and infestation is controlled

strep throat - until 24 hours after antibiotic is started

hand, foot, and mouth (coxsackievirus) - until 24 hours after fever is gone and your doctor advises your child's return to school.

If your child begins to exhibit symptoms of any illness or condition noted above, a teacher 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.

## **Accidents/Injuries and Other Emergency Situations**

Although every attempt is made to keep children safe, it is not unusual for young children to suffer minor injuries. Any time a child is significantly injured while at the Center, a teacher will complete an incident report, describing the accident or injury and treatment. Parents will be asked to sign the report, acknowledging their notification of the injury.

Upon a child's admission to the Lab School Program, a parent must sign an emergency contact/informed consent form. If an emergency occurs, the child's parents will be contacted as soon as possible. A staff member will stay with the child at all times until a parent arrives.

Monthly evacuation drills are held at the Early Learning Center in order for staff and children to practice exiting the building in case of a fire or emergency. A detailed emergency evacuation plan is posted in the office for your reference. The teachers are trained yearly in fire safety, emergency preparedness, first aid, and infant/child and adult CPR.

## **Snacks**

Snack time is an important part of our daily routine. Socialization is emphasized as children eat snacks in small groups with their teachers. The children are encouraged to practice self-help skills such as pouring their own juice and spreading peanut butter on crackers. The Early Learning Center will provide nutritious snacks with 100% fruit juice or milk to drink. Water is always available for children throughout the session. The children often help cook our snack for the day during free choice time. This experience incorporates learning skills in all content areas including math, literacy, and science.

Snacks for each day are listed in the parent newsletters. Please inform the teachers of any food allergies, and an alternate snack will be provided. Special snacks brought from home to celebrate birthdays or other special days are welcome. If you wish to provide a snack for the class, we simply ask that you inform the teachers a few days in advance so we can plan accordingly.



## **Withdrawal Notice**

Notice of a child's withdrawal from the Lab School program 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.

## **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.

# Questions and Answers

Q.

*What will my child learn at nursery school?*

The teachers design a flexible curriculum with the children's interests and abilities in mind. Collaboration among children and teachers in group activity is seen as an integral part of the learning process. Materials and activities cover all curricular areas (math, language and literacy, science, art, music and movement, fine and gross motor) and support growth in all developmental areas. Our classroom is divided into interest areas, which stimulate active learning. Ongoing interest areas include the following: blocks, dramatic play, art, sensory table, reading corner, writing center, table manipulatives, mixing and molding, science discovery, and computers. Other interest centers are added to incorporate the topic of study into the learning environment.

Q.

*Will my child be challenged academically?*

One of our goals at the Lab School is to help children acquire a strong foundation in the knowledge and skills needed for future school success. We recognize each child's individual needs and abilities. A teacher specifically assigned to work with your child in a small group setting will develop a portfolio containing a developmental skills checklist, work samples and pictures illustrating your child's participation in daily activities. This information will be used when planning lessons in order to introduce your child to new skills and to add to existing knowledge. Our environment is prepared in such a manner that we can meet the needs of all children and stretch their capabilities and interests without stress to the child.

Q.

*What are the benefits of a multiage classroom?*

A multiage classroom is one which includes children of mixed ages. The Lab school enrolls children ages 2 yrs. 9 mo. – 5 yrs. in the same classroom. The children, teachers and even parents become a "family" of learners, supporting and caring for one another, regardless of age or ability. Research has found that multiage classrooms increase opportunities for cross-age learning. Younger children benefit from collaborative learning with the older children, and the older children develop leadership skills, while modeling skill development for the younger children. In the multiage classroom, each child is viewed individually, and every child is given opportunities to be successful on his or her path of growth.

Q.

*What types of field trips are included in the program?*

Field trips are an important part of the program. A field trip can provide hands-on experience to enhance a particular topic that cannot be duplicated in the classroom. Follow-up activities reinforce the learning that occurs on the trip.

The types of field trips vary and can possibly best be understood by some examples. If we were developing the concept of smell, we might take a trip to a local bakery. Talking about fall harvest would lead us to an apple orchard while Fire Prevention Week would find us at the firehouse.

One of the benefits of being located in a College environment is the opportunity for many relevant on-campus field trips and guest speakers. We often take nature walks to observe specific aspects of nature and the world around us. Other examples of field trips within our campus community include the following: visiting the kitchen and dining hall, the post office, the library and the radio station.

When taking an off-campus field trip, we use College mini-vans as the primary means of transportation, driven by licensed teachers. Written notice of such trips will be provided in advance with a permission slip indicating parental consent. Parents are required to provide a labeled child safety seat for their child.

Parents are always welcome to accompany us on field trips; however, you may need to provide your own transportation.

**Q.** *How do I know if my child is ready for nursery school?*

There is no magical age for sending your child to nursery school. Children develop at different rates and may be ready for a school experience earlier or later than others. We see our program as an extension of the home learning experience, and it is our goal to work together with parents to provide the best environment for each child. If you are unsure about whether or not your child is ready for school, visiting the classroom would be helpful in making this decision. You can discuss your questions and concerns with the teacher, and reading materials on child development are available at the Center to help you in making a decision.



## **Conclusion**

The Lab School Program provides activities that will contribute to the social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development of your child. Since all children do not develop at the same rate, do not come from the same backgrounds, and do not have the same needs and aspirations, the program is flexible and varied. It is our desire to work together with families to help children reach developmental milestones by meeting their individual needs in a safe and secure environment. Thank you for your interest in the Lab School Program, and we look forward to working together to provide a positive learning experience for your child.