

SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

August 1, 2023

Dear ECC Families,

I am excited to share some news with you about plans for the ECC's outdoor play spaces!

If you have been a part of the ECC previously, you know how much time is spent working outside! The outdoors has always played a large part in how we think about a child's time at the ECC. We always consider and plan for our outdoor spaces in the same careful manner that we provision our classrooms for a wide range of learning experiences. The natural environment affords children endless learning possibilities and gives them a familiarity that sometimes isn't found in the classroom. We are so fortunate at both Kober and Wilford to have large, expansive spaces for children to explore.

We began to look closely at our yards and realized that the current spaces no longer fit our vision of what is important for children, or truly speak to the way we think about their time outdoors. We envision spaces that inspire imagination and discovery, facilitate opportunities for children to create their own play experiences, and allow and cultivate more outdoor and environmental education opportunities. Our yards are used throughout the year in all weather and include mud play areas and lots of loose parts. We foresee adding spaces that offer some shade and weather protection to allow more time outdoors, both for children to play independently and for teachers to facilitate activities with whole groups. We are looking to change the yard configurations and are excited to think about the possibilities- including rethinking how the yard can facilitate integration of the age groups.

This past spring we embarked on our project. With the support of SLC's Child Development Institute, we began to consider how to redesign our outside play spaces in ways that would bring in more opportunities for our children in the outdoor setting. We began a collaboration with experts at North Carolina State University's Natural Learning Initiative (NLI). They are creating plans that will assist us in converting the yards into ECOPALS (early childhood outdoor play and learning spaces) that exemplify best practice design informed by the latest research, to support healthy, holistic child development through outdoor play and learning engaged with nature. We are also fortunate to have SLC's landscape architect and her team working with us on the greenery and plantings.

During the spring semester, graduate students documented children's play and they will continue observing and recording data about how the gradual redesign of the yards impacts the children's play throughout the fall. During this process we also interviewed

(and will continue to interview) children about their special places in the playgrounds and asked them what kinds of things they like to do outside. That information will give us the opportunity to create spaces that reflect children's interests as stakeholders in the space. This summer we removed all the fixed play structures (and re-seeded the yards) and we are curious and excited to see what new places in the yard become interesting for the children. All of this will be documented throughout the fall and will be used to inform decisions about the restructuring. We couldn't be more thrilled and look forward to seeing how it all unfolds throughout the year! We will provide updates as we move through! Here's to an exciting year of discovery and change!

Warmly,
Lorayne

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lorayne Carbon".

Lorayne Carbon

Director, Early Childhood Center