



## **2023-2024 Parent Handbook**

The Sarah Lawrence Early Childhood Center is a school for children ages two to six, as well as a field placement site for Sarah Lawrence students interested in child development and teaching. Established by a foundation grant in 1937 as a setting for research and observation of child development, it was originally known as the Sarah Lawrence Nursery School and was open to children three and four years of age.

Change and expansion over the years has resulted in what is now the Early Childhood Center, with additional classes for two-year-olds, who attend with a parent present, and multi-age classes for threes/fours, fours/fives and fives/sixes. We welcome families from all backgrounds and cultures. We seek to reflect the world community and are committed to diversity among both staff and families.

Today the Center continues to serve as a laboratory school for the college. To date, we are the longest running laboratory setting in the United States. Our lead teachers are scholars of contemporary viewpoints and research in child psychology and early childhood education.

## **How Young Children Learn**

### **Developmental Considerations**

At all ages and stages children are learning as they grow. In our classrooms, you will see in action the importance of a developmentally appropriate curriculum and of each child's *right* to move through this curriculum at their own pace.

Children begin as egocentric literal thinkers, and move gradually toward a larger view of other people's feelings and attitudes. They develop a newfound ability to transform their concrete experiences into abstract thoughts.

The philosophy of early childhood education that you see in action at the Early Childhood Center is called *Developmental-Interaction*. Developmental-Interaction, conceptualized by psychologists and educators at the Bank Street College of Education, takes into account the developmental stages (intellectual, social and emotional) through which children move, and considers these stages as guides in designing appropriate curriculum for children of different ages. Within this general framework, a child's individual interests and multiple talents are recognized, listened to, and utilized by teachers who work as supporters and partners in the learning process of both individual children and the class as a whole.

We think of intellectual, social, and emotional development as being interrelated, as well as interactive. For instance, when you feel good about yourself, you tend to take on intellectual challenges more creatively, and approach social situations with more confidence.

Another way of thinking about interaction concerns the young child's ability to cooperate with and learn from the environment. This has educational implications for the interactive possibilities inherent in physical surroundings and suggests the rich intellectual potential and social stimulation that await children who have opportunities to talk with and challenge each other.

At the Early Childhood Center you will see children playing and working in classrooms set up to respect a range of developmental levels and to offer many “invitations” for interaction. The daily schedule will have a clear structure, but within that structure there will be stretches of time (both indoors and outdoors) during which children are free to make choices, interact with each other, and seek help from teachers to further their many ideas and interest.

Our teachers are aware that children learn best when they are allowed to be active, to be investigators, and to interact with others. The pioneering work of John Dewey, the research of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, the developmental theories of Lev Vygotsky, and the work of Howard Gardner, along with other major educators and researchers support this premise. As in the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, we see young children as powerful learners who deserve an environment that is not only aesthetically pleasing but that also can play a “teaching” role. Documenting and monitoring children’s work helps us to see their growth. It is important that children are “allowed” to be children; to be a three year old when three, a four year old when four, and not to be rushed on to the “next”.

### **The Importance of Pretend Play**

*Pretend play is the basis upon which interest and capabilities and imaginative and intellectual strengths are formed. It is the most fertile area for the development of the child’s mind.*

Child-initiated imaginative play is losing out to academic training and programmed activities in young children's lives. This is in part because many adults are unaware of the direct links between children's play and their healthy emotional, social, and intellectual development. We know now from brain research that the experiences children have during play helps to strengthen and expand neural connections in their rapidly developing brain.

When children pretend, they are deeply engaged in many kinds of learning. Actively involved with other children and adults, they explore materials and discover possibilities, confront problems and find solutions, and create narratives that reflect and extend their experience of themselves and the world. In this way, they learn without being directly taught. This type of exploration is critical to human development and to a child's mental health and well-being.

Too often, pretend play is seen simply as a child's entertainment: a pleasurable activity, perhaps beneficial for a sense of well-being, but not relevant to intellectual development. In fact, when children pretend, they are involved in focused intellectual work grounded in observation, exploration and experimentation.

Learning that first takes place in pretend play forms the basis for later intellectual and social development, such as:

- Academic work as it draws on reasoning and the capacity to represent experience through the use of symbols, especially with regard to literacy
- The ability to think hypothetically and test out ideas; to imagine what does not yet exist in both aesthetic and scientific realms
- The development of narrative construction in storytelling

- All forms of collaborative work that involve the sharing of ideas, planning, negotiation, and compromise

### **The Classroom as a Community**

The result of our understanding that each child's individual areas of competence develop over time is the concept of "classroom as community." In our classrooms we provide opportunities for children to accomplish the goals of the curriculum in a manner and at a pace most satisfying and exciting to them within the context of a classroom community defined by safety, order and humanity. Classrooms become reflections of the children and adults and change and grow over time.

### **Structure**

The Early Childhood Center is located in two buildings.

The **Kober** building holds classes in the morning. The building address is 12 Wilgarth Rd

- Twos and Parents Tuesday and Thursday
- Threes Tuesday and Thursday and Threes Monday, Wednesday and Friday
- Fours am

The **Wilford** building holds classes in the morning and full day. The building address is 123 Boulder Trail

- Fours/Fives am
- Five /Sixes

The two houses of the Early Childhood Center operate as one coordinated facility. Bi-weekly staff meetings are held, and all members of the staff attend to discuss

curriculum and other important child development and educational issues relevant to a college laboratory school.

Our director, Lorayne Carbon, maintains her office in Kober but spends time in both the Kober and the Wilford buildings. Our administrative assistant, Angelines Alba Lamb, coordinates between buildings from her office on the first floor of Kober.

### **Communication and Conferencing**

Communication between teachers and parents is vital for understanding and best serving children's needs. Our getting to know you and your family enhances your child's experience in the classroom as a whole.

It is important that you share with teachers any information that may affect your child's experience at school. This helps them to understand your child's particular style and ways of thinking, and current life experiences.

Although we always welcome an exchange of information, the teachers ask that your conversations be brief when your child is present. In cases where a note or a short chat is not adequate, staff can always be reached by telephone at school, or by email.

Regular conferences between teachers and parents will be scheduled twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. In addition, teachers will be glad to meet with you at your request. *Please be sure to make childcare arrangements for conferences. Children may not be present at conferences so parents and teachers may speak freely*

Small group meetings for parents and evening meetings are organized by Early Childhood Center staff as well as the Parents' Association and are held at various times throughout the year.

Lorayne is available to parents, either informally or by appointment, and always appreciates your questions and comments. Her email is lcarbon@slc.edu.

### **Separation**

Settling into school should be as comfortable and natural as possible. While some children separate quickly from their parents, for others the process will be more gradual. There is no “best” timing. In this, as in all else, each child and family are different and have our respect. Separation is not a race, nor is it an indication of good or better parenting. The logistics vary from class to class, but ALWAYS include a gradual start. Our teachers have a great deal of experience in supporting both children and parents to accomplish this task. Children will never be allowed to be simply “dropped off,” nor will a parent be allowed to leave without saying goodbye. Children are always served best by honest and open good-byes, even when distressed.

### **Arrival**

We recognize that some days are more challenging than others when trying to leave home with children. Please make every effort to arrive at the start of school. Arriving late takes the teacher out of the classroom, as well as potentially affecting other children who have already said goodbyes and have just settled into the day. If you are going to arrive late, please communicate that to the main office. Messages can be left on machines. Teachers do not check their personal emails or texts during class times, with the exception of just before dismissal. The main number is 914 395 2353.

### **Student Assistants**

One of the most unique and appealing aspects of the ECC is the staff-to-child ratio that is accomplished by the presence of college students in the classroom.

Students work as “participant observers”, taking part in the life of the classroom. They work under the direction of the classroom’s lead teacher. Student assistants are graduate and undergraduates fulfilling their fieldwork requirements for education, child development or psychology courses. These students add to the diversity and “flavor” of the ECC by bringing their own blend of enthusiasm and ideas. Part of their responsibility as students is to meet before and after class time with their lead teacher to discuss questions, share observations and receive feedback.

### **Social Media**

In this time of easy access to photography, we ask that you remember privacy issues of other families. Just as students are prohibited from posting pictures of the children on social media sites, we ask the same courtesy from you. You are welcome to post pictures of your own child, but please do not post pictures of other people’s children. Please do not tag the ECC as a location in your photos. Video recording is not allowed at any time without the knowledge and permission of the classroom teacher.

### **Babysitting Guidelines**

Sarah Lawrence College students are a wonderful resource for babysitting, and while you are welcome to approach students to ask, you may not employ students who currently work in your child’s class. It is a conflict of interest for the student, and causes confusion for the child. Students who do not follow this guideline will be terminated from their field placement, so please do not put a student in an awkward position by asking them to sit. The office will compile a list of potential sitters and you can reach out to Angelines for names



### **Class Parents and Parents Association**

Each class will have an assigned class parent who will help the teacher coordinate things like snacks, messages, material collections etc.

The Parents Association helps to identify and meet the needs of parents, and to support and enhance the Early Childhood Center's work in whatever ways seem appropriate in a particular year. Activities include planning meetings open to everyone in the school community, evening events related to parenting issues, and fund-raising for needed equipment, special programs, and scholarships. All parents of children at the Early Childhood Center are members of the Parents Association. We look forward this year to moving back into a more visible format!

### **Practical Information**

Absences should be called in to (914) 395-2353

Twos and Parents                      9:30-11:30

(The move to the full two hours is gradual over the first semester)

Threes                                      9:00-11:30

Fours                                        9:00-11:55

Fours/Fives am                        9:00-11:55

Fives/Sixes                               9:00- 2:00

Please notify your child's teacher in writing if there is a change in your pick up person. *We will not dismiss a child to anyone unless we have written permission. This includes someone who is on your emergency pick up. We still need permission to dismiss to someone other than the regular pick up permission*

## **Clothing**

Your child should wear clothing that allows for comfy movement, easy bathroom access and some opportunity to develop and practice self-help skills in dressing. Please do not send your child in a costume or fancy dress clothing.

It is especially important that you dress your child suitably for all kinds of weather. We use the outdoor play spaces in all but the coldest and wettest weather. Our outdoor curriculum is a vital part of the total program and we want children to be able to participate fully and with comfort!

Your child must have a complete change of clothes including shoes or sneakers, underwear, socks, and a sweater, packed for storage in their cubby. In the winter months, snow pants, boots and mittens are essential. *All items must be labeled clearly with your child's name.*

*\*\*To facilitate optimal outdoor play we are also requesting all children have rain pants that have a bib and suspenders for easy access and maximum coverage. Our playground gets muddy and wet and so do the children!*

*\*\*All children must keep a pair of "indoor shoes" to wear in the classroom. Slippers are fine as long as they have a non-slip bottom.*

## **Nut Free Policy/Allergies**

The Early Childhood Center maintains itself as a nut-free school to the extent that is reasonably possible. All reasonable precautions will be taken in and around the classrooms, common areas and play areas to maintain a nut-free environment. However, it is impossible to completely control the environment and we cannot guarantee that the school or its grounds are entirely free of any nuts.

Please inform your child's teacher if they are allergic to any particular food or other substances. *All allergies are posted prominently in the classrooms along with a photograph of your child so all staff are familiar with and aware of the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction.*

### **Medication Policy**

We cannot dispense over-the-counter or prescription medication. Permission will be granted for allergy medication to be kept on the premises to administer **in the case of an emergency**. We must have a doctor's note giving dispensing information as well as the prescription on file to administer medication. All medications must be in original containers and updated as per prescription guidelines.

Sunscreen must be applied prior to coming to school. Teachers are not permitted to put sunscreen on children and children are not permitted to bring and apply sunscreen themselves.

### **Emergency/Illness Procedures**

Health and safety is always prioritized at the Early Childhood Center. We know handwashing is key. Children will be asked to wash their hands or hand sanitize as they enter the classrooms, during transition times, before and after snack time and before going home.

Children must be fever free 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication before returning to school.

Children must be 24 hours post vomit or diarrhea without the assistance of medication before returning to school.

Colds are always tricky. Some children never stop having a runny nose all winter. The general rule of thumb is first, the child's general wellbeing. A child can be fever free but still should remain home when they are tired or show signs of sickness. Think about how you as an adult feel when you have a cold! When

mucus is all over and can't be contained, children should remain home. Coughs too can be problematic and signs of other things. If a cough can't be contained we may call you to pick up. Signs of illness, such as a sore throat, congestion with thick mucus, headache or earache, or unusual fatigue are all signs that a child must be kept home for their well-being as well as for that of the other children and teachers. The health and safety of the entire community is our responsibility and we take it seriously.

An emergency form must be on file so that we may locate you in the event of an emergency. Our procedure is to first call a parent(s) and then work our way down the list of people on your emergency form. The person listed as an emergency pick up must be someone that can actually come to pick up- not grandma and grandpa in Florida!

### **Birthdays**

We support the desire of some children to recognize their birthday. Not all children wish to have their birthday acknowledged in the group. Please discuss with your child's teacher an appropriate way to recognize.

### **Holidays**

We take a very low key approach to holidays in general, as they can be overwhelming to children, as well as to families. We want to be respectful of the many ways that families observe (and don't) and therefore we don't do any recognition as a whole. We underplay the more stimulating aspects of holidays (for instance, children may not bring masks or costumes at Halloween or Valentine's cards etc). We leave all that fun to you!

### **Snack**

Snack (and lunchtime for the 5/6's) is an important part of the classroom routine. It is a time to build community in the sharing of food and conversation. It helps children begin to learn to take turns, share space and wait, all within the context of eating something yummy. Snacks should be fruits or vegetables perhaps along with something simple like rice cakes or crackers (nothing sugary) and be in reusable containers to limit waste. Please also send in a filled, reusable/refillable water bottle as well, and *clearly label both items*. Your teacher will let you know if there are any food allergies and restrictions of what can be brought to the classroom.

### **Weather Related School Closings**

If we close in the event of a winter storm warning or other emergency, a voice message will be left on the main Kober number (914) 395-2353 by 7:30 am. Be aware that the ECC may close even if the College remains open, however, if the college closes we are automatically closed as well. You can also choose to enroll for messages on the REMIND app.

### **Emergency Evacuation**

In the event of an emergency, children and staff in the Kober building will evacuate to the Campbell Sports Center directly across from the ECC, and children and staff in the Wilford building will evacuate to the Sarah Lawrence Library, which is adjacent to the Wilford house. If it is not possible to leave the buildings, the children and staff will go to the basement or upstairs area of the buildings, depending upon the emergency in question. The ECC has a written emergency plan. Staff continues to be trained in the most current emergency procedures to meet the challenges of today's world.

### **Fire Drills**

Fire drills are conducted in accordance with Yonkers Fire Department regulations throughout the year.

Our buildings are regularly inspected by the Yonkers Fire Department and the Sarah Lawrence College Fire Inspector.

### **Parking Regulations**

All families will receive a temporary parking pass that must be displayed in the rear window of your car. Additional passes can be distributed as necessary.

#### **Kober Parking**

Kober is a busy main parking lot for the College. You may park in any space not allocated for faculty or staff. Cars that park directly in the front of the building in the fire lanes will be ticketed and booted by the College's safety and security officers. Do not park in the differently abled spaces unless you have a dangler allowing you access to these spaces. The small lot adjacent to Kober is not to be used for drop off or pick up unless arrangements have been made specifically with Lorayne. The ECC is part of the larger college community thus we must all be respectful of the parking regulations.

#### **Wilford Parking**

Wilford does not have a dedicated parking lot, and for that reason a "drop-off" and "pick-up" system has been organized by the ECC in conjunction with the College. Please follow directives given by the teachers. The drop off and pick up is coordinated with other departments of the college and therefore it is important that procedures are followed. The ECC is part of the larger college community thus we must all be respectful of the parking regulations.

This is such a special  
time in your child's  
life, and we are  
grateful to be a small  
part of preserving  
that time.