

DARIEN EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM (ELP)



2020 -
2021

Parent Handbook

Ox Ridge Elementary School
Royle Elementary School
Tokeneke Elementary School

Darien Early Learning Program (ELP)

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Philosophy

The Darien Early Learning Program values each child as an individual learner with unique strengths, needs and interests. We support children to become critical thinkers and social learners. Our play-based learning environments provide daily opportunities for preschool children to be purposeful, creative, inquisitive, flexible, and reflective. As a program designed to meet the needs of all learners, children in our diverse classrooms develop empathy toward others and an appreciation of differences. Families are critical partners in our support of children's growth and development.



Early Learning Program Curriculum

Curriculum Statement

Our approach to preschool curriculum planning has its foundation in the philosophies of “Emergent Curriculum” and “Project Approach”. Teachers use a variety of curriculum resources to plan the classroom environment, experiences, interactions, and opportunities for family engagements that are meaningful and relevant to the observed interests of children. The CT Early Learning and Development Standards for Birth to Five detail what



children should know and be able to do and serve as the basis for planning. Teachers engage in the cycle of intentional teaching, consistently observing and assessing children's growth and using this information to plan and implement the highest quality learning experiences.



Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards

<https://www.ctoec.org/connecticut-early-learning-and-development-standards-ct-elds/ct-elds-forms-and-documents/>

Connecticut's Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) were developed through the work of the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet and its Early Learning Standards



Workgroup and published by the Office of Early Childhood. The ELDS are the newest preschool standards to be released in CT. The ELDS describes the trajectory of skills that are attained, learned, and demonstrated by children between the ages of birth to five. The ELDS are organized by eight domains: social and emotional, physical health, language and literacy, creative arts, mathematics, science, cognition, and social studies. These learning standards are a guide for adults who

support children's growth and development.

Assessment and Sharing Progress with Families

The best way to assess a child's learning and development during the preschool years is to observe them in the context of their play. Teachers engage in ongoing observation and use the information that they learn to implement teaching strategies that best support individual children and provide the highest quality experiences to the group. The CT ELDS is a tool for planning; it is not an assessment and should not be used as such.

Connecticut Documentation and Observation System as a framework to guide early care and education providers in monitoring children's progress on the skill, abilities and behaviors outlined in the ELDS.

- CT DOTS will be used to observe and document children's learning and development in naturally occurring situations and to plan for engaging experiences that allow for more intentional observations. CT DOTS also provides a structure for partnering with families in sharing information about children's learning and development.

- The CT DOTS will be administered in the fall and spring of each school year and will be discussed during parent conferences.

Arrival & Dismissal Procedures

ELP School Hours

Monday - Thursday

20/16 hour classes

8:30 am or 9:30 am Arrival

1:30 pm Dismissal for all children

Reminder – Arriving at school in a timely fashion ensures that predictable and comfortable routines will be followed. Tardiness disrupts classroom routines and creates the likelihood that your child may not be able to participate fully in an activity due to a shortened timeframe.

The Early Learning Program Drop Off and Pick-Up Procedures are different from the elementary school procedures. Please ensure a prompt arrival as well as pick up.

Procedure for Change in Dismissal

Please send a note and/or email to the teacher. Remember that teachers will check email prior to student's arrival but might not be able to check during school hours. Teacher will reply to emails to confirm that they are aware of the change in dismissal.

If you need to make a change in departure during the day, **ELP does not use School Dismissal Manager**. If you do not receive confirmation during the day from the teacher regarding the change in departure, please call the School Secretary to ensure the change of departure.

School Closings

School closings and delayed openings due to snowstorms or other emergencies are announced on local stations as early in the morning as possible, usually after 6:00 am. For quickest response, register for on the Darien Public School ASPEN account which will give you access to **School Messenger** for email and text alerts related to school closings and changes in school schedules.

Delayed Opening

If a 2 hour delay is announced by the district, ELP will operate on a **2 hour and 10 minute delay**. ELP 8:30 arrivals will arrive at 10:40 and ELP 9:30 arrivals will arrive at 11:40. School will end at 1:30.

Emergency or Early Dismissal

In the case of an emergency early dismissal, the Early Learning Program children will be **dismissed: early release 10:00 a.m. OR late release 12:00 p.m.**

Early Dismissal A planned, non-emergency, early dismissal, Early Learning Program will be **dismissed at 12:00 p.m.** See the ELP calendar for specific dates.



Additional Program Information

Contacting Classrooms

Teachers are available to respond to emails and phone calls before student arrival at 8:30 am and after student dismissal at 1:30 pm. In the event that you have an immediate need to speak to classroom staff (e.g. student absence or change in arrival or dismissal) we ask that you call the classroom. This ensures that your information is received, especially in the event that the classroom teacher is absent. Contact information for each school can be found at the end of this handbook.

Daily and Monthly Communication

Due to a district-wide effort to “go green,” daily and monthly communication sheets will be sent from teachers via electronic communication. Every afternoon, teachers will either email a note or blog posting highlighting some of the day’s activities.

For special needs students, teachers and therapists will send home a monthly communication report. For students requiring more frequent communication, arrangements will be made with the child’s teacher for weekly communication reports. During months in which conferences are held (December, March, and May) no monthly communication reports will be sent.

Conferences

Conferences are held in December, March and end of May. In December and May conferences are scheduled with parents of all students. In March, conferences are held for special needs students and for typically developing peers by request.

Conferences will be held via Zoom.

Please consult the ELP calendar for information regarding conference schedule during which there is no ELP program and early dismissal for ELP during elementary conferences for students in grades K-5 at Ox Ridge, Royle, and Tokeneke Schools.

Clothing

Students attending the ELP program should wear clothes appropriate for the preschool setting. **Students are strongly encouraged to wear sneakers on a daily basis.** Due to the program having a daily motor component, students should wear clothes that are easy to move in. The students will go outside on most days, so please send in appropriate clothes for the weather (i.e. gloves, hats, coats). Pants with elastic waistbands make it easier for the children during toileting activities. Please note that clothes may get soiled during messy art projects. Please send in extra clothing to be stored in school in case of an accident.



Mask Wearing: As of September 15, 2020

As Guidance from the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and the Connecticut State Department of Education of Education (CSDE) continues to evolve with the changing nature of the pandemic, I will continue to provide you updated information regarding our plans to ensure our compliance with the recommendations and requirements.

On September 14, 2020, the Commissioner of OEC released [Coronavirus Memo 29](#), which provided updated requirements for mask wearing by children and allowable group sizes.

Per the Guidance, allowable group sizes have increased to 16 students in a classroom. In addition, as of September 21, 2020, students over the age of 3 must wear a mask while attending school. Districts may develop phase-in plans which must be completed by October 19, 2020. Over the next week, I will be working closely with the Director of Nursing for the Darien Public Schools, Alicia Casucci, APRN, CPNP, NCSN, to develop phase-in protocols for mask wearing in our ELP classrooms. Please note that the Guidance allows for exceptions (below), and our teams will work closely with all of our ELP families to determine if students may require additional supports or require exemption from the new policies.

- A child with a documented medical condition, special health care need, or developmental need (such as sensory integration) for whom wearing a mask or face covering would be contrary to their health or safety is not required to wear a mask.
- A child with a documented disability or special education need for whom wearing a mask or face covering would be contrary to their needs may be permitted exceptions. In addition, children and staff involved with certain special education and related services activities like speech and language therapy or where lip reading is required may remove a face-covering mask intermittently.

In addition, please note that the following:

- Children are not required to wear a mask while eating, sleeping or resting. Distance between children must be maximized, maintaining at least 6 feet of distance wherever possible when masks are removed.
- Children who are newly enrolled within the past two months and are working toward mask wearing are permitted to remove their mask or face covering.
- Children who have just turned three years old may have up to two months to acclimate to wearing a mask or face covering and support developmental readiness.
- 'Mask breaks' may be planned and scheduled throughout the day. Mask breaks indoors must maximize physical distance between individuals, maintaining at least 6 feet of distance wherever possible.
- Masks may be removed for outdoor activities.

As we develop our phase-in protocols for ELP, we continue to encourage you and your family, when appropriate and if safe, to practice wearing masks at home and during family outings to help your child become acclimated to the feeling of wearing a mask.

School Lunch Program

Please visit the Darien Public School's website for the School Lunch Program:

https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399039&type=d

To view Darien Public Schools lunch menus and set up your online ordering account please visit

darienps.nutrislice.com

You may order meals up to a week in advance and ordering closes at 7:30am for same day ordering.

Paying for Lunch:

https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399039&type=d&termREC_ID=&pREC_ID=900742

Free and Reduced Lunch Program

Some families may be eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch program. Please follow the link to free and reduced lunch applications on the District website:

https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399164&type=d&pREC_ID=741237

Snacks

This school year families will pack individual snacks for students. ELP is no longer able to participate in shared snacks.

All snacks should be peanut-free and nut-free, regardless of whether or not there is an allergy present in the classroom. Snacks should also be delivered ready to be eaten (e.g. fruit sliced).

Role of Program Therapists

Preschool Psychologist

The Preschool Team includes a psychologist who will coordinate between the preschools in providing pre-referral strategies and observe and evaluate children referred by the Team to determine eligibility for special education services. The Psychologist is also available to provide support to parents and teachers regarding behavioral concerns.



Physical Therapy

Darien's ELP Preschool Program provides educationally based physical therapy services to those students who have qualified via the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) process. The Physical Therapist's role is to improve the student's safety and independence with gross motor skills within his/her educational setting. The Physical Therapist works closely with the ELP's professional and paraprofessional staff to ensure carryover of activities throughout the school day. In addition, the ELP classrooms are structured with motor groups and other motor activities integrated into the classroom schedule.

Occupational Therapy

Darien's ELP Preschool Program provides educationally based occupational therapy services to address the special needs of children determined to be eligible following an evaluation by a Planning and Placement Team. OT works on upper body and trunk strength, hand function and strength, scissor skills, sensory processing, motor planning the playground and/or indoor obstacle courses, self-feeding, managing jackets and shoes as required in the classroom setting, teacher and parent education and training on home/classroom strategies, "sensory diets", and classroom modifications/accommodations to benefit the child's development in fine/visual motor skills, attention, upper body strength, sensory processing skill, and self-help skills.



Speech-Language Pathologist

The Early Learning Program Speech-Language Pathologists assume a number of responsibilities. Speech & Language Pathologists receive referrals for children who may need speech-language services, complete observations in community-based preschools, and provide formal and informal evaluations. In order to meet each child's specific needs, individual and small group speech-language sessions are provided, as well as large group language sessions within the

class, in collaboration with the classroom teachers.

Health and Safety Information

All children in the Darien Public Schools Early Learning Program are required by Connecticut State Law and the Board of Education to have the following in order to attend school:

- A completed State of Connecticut Early Childhood Assessment Record: a physical exam with primary immunizations completed within 365 days prior to the start of school. All preschool physicals expire one year from the date of the physical. (A reminder will be sent home for those children who have physicals that will expire before the end of the year).
- A flu shot by December 31st of each new school year (for those ELP students that have never received a flu shot before, 2 shots separated by 28 days are required)
- Parents must complete parental and emergency contact information electronically on ASPEN (a secure, web-based school information management system used by DPS to collect contact and medical emergency information for your children).

Student Contact & Medical Emergency Information

1. Create an ASPEN account (if you don't already have one). Accounts are issued for your whole family. Go to https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399653&type=d to complete and submit the form to get your account started. Allow at least 2 weeks for processing. You will receive your username/password at your registered home address.
2. When you receive your login information, visit the site and review the contact and emergency medical information for **each of your children** to assure that it is complete and accurate. Please fill out all tabs for each child. Your initials are required on the final tab in order for the information to process.
3. You can update emergency information at any time. It takes 24 hours for new or updated information to be posted in Aspen. If you have any questions or issues with your Aspen account, please email aspen@darienps.org. This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it.
4. Your Aspen account will give you access to School Messenger for email and text alerts related to school closings and changes in school schedules

In the event a child becomes ill or is injured during the school day, the School Nurse will make every attempt to contact the parent before releasing the child to the friend, relative or neighbor listed on the emergency card. In the event of a serious accident we will stay with your child, call 911 and contact the parents. In order for the school to have the most accurate and up-to-date emergency contact info parents must update the information on ASPEN whenever there are any changes in contact phone numbers and/or addresses.

Absences

Please call the School Office Attendance Line at your child's school by 8:15am every day your child is absent. Your message should include *child's name, date & time, child's teacher, and reason for absence*. Please also email the classroom teacher.

Ox Ridge 203-655-2579

Royle 203-655-0044

Tokeneke 203-655-9666

For the most up to date information regarding Health and Health related topics please go to the Darien Public School Health website:

https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=398963&type=d

ELP at Ox Ridge Elementary School

ELP Website: https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399038&type=d

School Phone: 203-655-2579

ELP Staff	Title	Extension
Laura Straiton	Program Director of Early Childhood-SESS	(203)656-7472 lstraiton@darienps.org
Jennifer Ki	ELP Psychologist	(475)-266-7612 jki@darienps.org
Michele Schaller	ELP Speech Therapist	mschaller@darienps.org
Karen Albro	ELP Physical Therapist	kalbro@darienps.org
Heather Neff	ELP Occupational Therapist	hneff@darienps.org
Kimberly Pierre-Louis & Yvonne Dempsey	School Nurses	X4603; ydempsey@darienps.org
Laurie Wigglesworth	ELP Teacher	X4632; lwigglesworth@darienps.org
Christine Reid	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	
Amanda Merjian	ELP Teacher	X4627; amerjian@darienps.org
Jessica Rosado	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	

ELP at Royle Elementary School

ELP Website: https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399038&type=d

School Phone: 203-655-0044

ELP Staff	Title	Extension
Laura Straiton	Program Director of Early Childhood-SESS	(203)656-7472 lstraiton@darienps.org
Jennifer Ki	ELP Psychologist	(475)-266-7612 ki@darienps.org
Samantha Walker	ELP Speech Therapist	X4878; sawalker@darienps.org
Laura DiScala	ELP Speech Therapist	X4878; ldiscala@darienps.org
Karen Albro	ELP Physical Therapist	X4837; kalbro@darienps.org
Heather Neff	ELP Occupational Therapist	X4837; hneff@darienps.org
Robin Boccanfuso & Nathalie Isidore	School Nurses	X4803; rboccanfuso@darienps.org
Jo-Ann Epstein	ELP Teacher	X4853; jepstein@darienps.org
Marisa Ehrlich-Siegel	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	
Karyn Wynot	ELP Teacher	X4855; kwynot@darienps.org
Amanda Levy, Rena Field, Alessandra Padilha	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	
Jessica Markus	ELP Teacher	X4856; jmarkus@darienps.org
Jen Gould, Lucy Ventker, Amy Rissolo	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	
Jessica Easter	ELP Itinerant Teacher	X4849; jeaster@darienps.org
Nicolette Oczkowski	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	

ELP at Tokeneke

ELP Website: https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399038&type=d

School Phone: 203-655-9666

ELP Staff	Title	Extension
Laura Straiton	Program Director of Early Childhood-SESS	(203)656-7472 lstraiton@darienps.org
Jennifer Ki	ELP Psychologist	(475)-266-7612 jki@darienps.org
Lauren Tarzia	ELP Speech Therapist	X4188; ltarzia@darienps.org
Samantha Hilse	ELP Occupational Therapist	X4151; shilse@darienps.org
Karen Albro	ELP Physical Therapist	X4152; kalbros@darienps.org
Kim Martini & Donna Asari	School Nurse	X4103; kmartini@darienps.org
Annmarie Appel	ELP Teacher	X4143; aappel@darienps.org
Dayna Patashnik, Regine Thadal,	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	
Kristin Iorio	ELP Teacher	X4191; kiorio@darienps.org
Donna Bruno, Jenna Stewart	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	
Whitney Mullins	ELP Teacher	X4154; wmullins@darienps.org
Amanda Martinez, Antoinetta Napolitano, Melissa Magoveny	Classroom Paraprofessional Team	

Helpful Links and Resources

Other useful links that can be found on the Darien Public Schools website:

<http://www.darienps.org/current/>

Early Learning Program website:

https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399038&type=d

Darien Public Schools Parent Resources:

https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=399653&type=d

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood:

<https://www.ctoec.org/>

Connecticut State Department of Special Education:

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Services/Special-Education#:~:text=The%20Connecticut%20State%20Department%20of%20Education%2C%20Bureau%20of%20Data%20System%20%28CT-SEDS%29%20in%20the%202022-23%20school%20year.>

Parent Guide to Special Education:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Special-Education/Parents_Guide_SE.pdf

Procedural Safeguard in Special Education:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOC/Pdf/EducationProceduralSafeguardspdf.pdf>

Parental Notification of the Laws Relating to **Seclusion and Restraint** in the Public Schools:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Special-education/2018_parental_notification_of_the_laws_relating_to_seclusion_and_restraint_in_the_public_schools.pdf?la=en