

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM



Philosophy

“Between birth and 5 years old, 90 percent of a child’s brain development occurs, and at a lightning-fast pace. Every sight, smell, sound and sensation makes an impact.”

- Bill Frist, MD, Harvard Medical School

Alexander Dawson’s differentiated approach to early childhood education supports this critical window of opportunity by ensuring each child spends their day working toward individual goals identified through ongoing assessments. Essential capacities such as self-regulation, executive functioning and problem solving are embedded throughout the early childhood experience. We believe early childhood is a time for learners to investigate the world around them and to discover and communicate their wonders, inquiries, and discoveries.

Our program is designed to include standards from The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Through intentional instruction and a commitment to each child’s learning goals, our early childhood program prepares our youngest students for the K-8 experience and the community as a whole.

Curriculum Overview

The Early Childhood division of The Alexander Dawson School provides developmentally-appropriate, multi-age classrooms and a program that is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC Accreditation began with the goal of raising the level of early childhood programs and represents the mark of quality in early childhood education.

The goal of Dawson’s Early Childhood program is to nurture, challenge and assist students in developing socially, emotionally, and intellectually. This is accomplished by fostering independence and developing skills such as problem solving, listening, language, and fine and gross motor skills.

The Early Childhood curriculum includes literacy (i.e., reading, writing, phonics, word study), mathematics, social-emotional development, technology, music and movement, studio art, library, and health and fitness. The curriculum combines direct instruction and play-based activities, taking into account each student’s developmental level for individualized instruction.





OUR MISSION

The Alexander Dawson School at Rainbow Mountain is a nurturing learning community for students in preschool through grade eight that challenges students to achieve excellence in mind, body and character.

OUR VISION

Our graduates will be ready to achieve their individual potential, savor life and meet the challenges of the world.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The distinct Dawson learning environment is reflective of the diverse community that surrounds us. The celebration of differences drives the Dawson mission and unifies the school-wide focus of self and social awareness. Students benefit from working with and learning from other students and teachers who are varied in learning styles, socioeconomic backgrounds, race, religions, ideology, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, culture and ethnicity. We are committed to creating an inclusive and welcoming learning community.

CORE VALUES

B BELONGING

Our community exhibits empathy, integrity, humility, and kindness. We are accountable for our actions and learn deeply from others. We uplift diverse voices and build experiences that honor identity. We listen for understanding to develop and nurture purposeful partnerships.

E ENGAGEMENT

Our community believes wonder and joy result in thoughtful and enduring learning. True to the legacy of our founder, there is no limit to what we dream, do, try, and solve. Our learners exert voice and choice during the journey toward new competencies and skills. Our commitment to evolve and take ownership of our growth reflects our engagement with lifelong learning.

A ADVOCACY

Our community appreciates the sacrifices of others for freedom and social justice. We aspire to positively impact our school, local community, and the world. We investigate root causes, analyze solutions, connect with people in need, and are empowered activists in the problem-solving process. Dawson changemakers value global perspectives and a "Love of the Land".

R RESILIENCE

Our community believes learning should inspire creativity, collaboration, and innovation through experiences that embrace trial and error, failing forward, an iterative mindset, and reflection. Our founder believed in "Nothing Without Labor" and a transformative student experience that requires productive struggle.

Social-Emotional Development

Student experiences need to be shaped in ways that positively affect social and emotional learning. During early childhood, social-emotional capabilities are intertwined throughout the day. For example, children are given leadership opportunities through various activities such as peer presentations, music performances, classroom jobs and responsibilities, and goal setting. Community events, cross-grade level buddies and guest speakers allow opportunities for early childhood students to apply explicit skills modeled during morning meetings.

Learning Habits		
<input type="checkbox"/> Participates positively and appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates self-confidence and willingly takes on challenges	<input type="checkbox"/> Engages in small and whole group activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Makes simple, confident choices independently	<input type="checkbox"/> Understands and follows rules and procedures	<input type="checkbox"/> Sets and reflects upon goals
Responsibilities as a Community Member		
<input type="checkbox"/> Takes pride in work	<input type="checkbox"/> Works cooperatively with others	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses classroom materials with purpose and respect
<input type="checkbox"/> Works independently and remains on task	<input type="checkbox"/> Develops friendships with peers	<input type="checkbox"/> Shows enthusiasm for completion of work
Social-Emotional Skills		
<input type="checkbox"/> Able to regulate personal feelings and impulses; accepts responsibility for own actions	<input type="checkbox"/> Cooperates with peers and uses positive negotiation skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Displays kindness and concern for others.
<input type="checkbox"/> Manages transitions and adapts to changes in routines	<input type="checkbox"/> Expresses and communicates emotions appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/> Listens and follows directions
<input type="checkbox"/> Trusts and interacts comfortably with familiar adults	<input type="checkbox"/> Seeks assistance from adults when needed	<input type="checkbox"/> Aware of personal space

Literacy

The Early Childhood literacy curriculum is designed to meet each child's "zone of proximal development." Meaning, instruction begins just beyond their current level of independent capability. The one-on-one and small-group literacy instruction is just challenging enough to help each student take the next logical step in their ongoing skill development.

The program focuses on early literacy behaviors, including:

- Fostering a love of reading
- Developing phonological awareness, including letter identification, rhyming, phoneme blending, segmentation, and sound manipulation
- Comprehending stories and verbal communication
- Acquiring new vocabulary that becomes a part of their daily language
- Communicating through journal writing
- Establishing proper handwriting techniques, including proper pencil grip, consistent starting points, stroke order, and accurate ending points



Literacy instruction takes places in whole group, small group and one-on-one formats. Shared reading and writing instruction; hands-on explorations, games and manipulatives; and songs and centers are pedagogical strategies that reinforce literacy development. Students are immersed in a print-rich environment, and are inspired to share their stories through classroom read-alouds, role-playing, and visiting authors. The literacy program also introduces students to Dawson's 20,000-volume library!

Mathematics

The Early Childhood program introduces Everyday Mathematics, a curriculum continued through the K-6 program. Everyday Mathematics connects the study of mathematics to real-world, age-appropriate contexts. Daily math lessons allow students to work with partners, in small groups, and independently with teachers providing individualized support and feedback. Problem-solving opportunities provide students time to engage in the productive struggle of different strategies and embrace mathematical processes to find solutions. Students are encouraged to take risks in a learning environment that respects multiple mathematical approaches with emphasis placed on understanding why specific strategies are used, such as manipulatives, tools, written and spoken language, pictures, diagrams, and symbols. Furthermore, the Everyday Math program provides exposure to concepts and skills over time with frequent opportunities for the review and practice of essential skills. Classes engage in open-ended activities and games customized to meet the needs of students with a range of abilities to develop a positive math mindset early in their education. Number talks and counting collections are utilized to build number fluency and independent thinking.

Everyday Mathematics and other supplemental materials are used to emphasize the following content strands, skills, and concepts:

- Measurement: Demonstrate knowledge of size, volume, height, weight and length
- Numbers and Numeration: Understand the meanings, uses and representations of numbers
- Number Sense and Operations: Demonstrate knowledge of numbers and counting
- Patterns, Functions and Algebra: Understand patterns and functions
- Operations and Computation: Understand the meanings of operations
- Data and Chance: Select and create appropriate graphical representations of collected or given data
- Properties of Ordering: Identify and label shapes; sort, classify and organize objects
- Measurement and Reference Frames: Understand the systems and processes of measurement; use appropriate techniques, tools, units and formulas in making measurements
- Geometry: Investigate characteristics and properties of two-and-three-dimensional geometrical shapes

Science

Science is a catalyst for the development of a love of learning. Learning science and engineering in the early years fosters children's curiosity and enjoyment in exploring the world around them, and lays the foundation for a progression of science learning throughout their entire lives. Alexander Dawson's early childhood science instruction utilizes students' natural ability to wonder, question and experiment to help them investigate the world around them.

The early childhood teachers provide experiences that allow students to see patterns, form theories, consider alternate explanations and build knowledge. For example, working collaboratively with cross-grade-level buddies in the Ruffin Organic Garden provides opportunities for early childhood students to examine different textures, explore soil conditions conducive to plant growth, and make predictions about plant life and sustainability.

Scientific inquiries include:

- Exploring the world
- Predicting Outcomes
- Gathering Data
- Conducting Experiments
- Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking

Social Studies

Alexander Dawson's Early Childhood social studies curriculum is taught through short and long-term investigations, exploratory learning and classroom community building. The curriculum centers on human relationships in our world (self, family, friends, school, and neighborhood). Investigations may include the following topics: "All About Me" days, classroom responsibilities/classroom helpers, classroom rules/guidelines, feelings, celebrations around the world, and family traditions. Students become aware of their roles and responsibilities as a member of the family, school, and neighborhood.

Topics of Study:

- Family
- Community/Civics
- Economics
- Geography
- Global Awareness
- Community Service
- Cultural Competency



Technology

Teachers use technology in a variety of ways in Early Childhood to enhance the students' experience and assist them in gaining a greater appreciation and understanding for technology in their world. As each school year progresses, our students become more capable and autonomous utilizing technology.

Technology utilized in the Early Childhood classrooms:

- Each teacher uses digital photos and videos to document student learning and provide feedback to students and parents
- iPods, iPads and AppleTVs are used to incorporate music and technology into the learning environment
- Students use three-in-one projectors when working in small groups to solve problems
- Light and sensory tables are used for exploring patterns, complex formations, mathematic concepts and artistic expressions

The Early Childhood classrooms are equipped with iPads to support and enhance lessons. The iPads are used individually, during center time, for small-group instruction as well as whole group lessons. The iPad applications reinforce one-to-one correspondence, math, phonological awareness, letter and sound recognition, and writing.

