THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF CLAYTON

THE FAMILY CENTER

Family Handbook 2026-2027

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THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF CLAYTON

THE FAMILY CENTER

Welcome

The Family Center staff and I welcome you to the new school year! Whether you are continuing or just beginning your Family Center journey, we are excited about your participation in our program(s) and look forward to a terrific year of learning.

We encourage a strong home-school connection and you will find important information in this handbook. Please review the Family Center policies, beliefs and values and our school year calendar on page 4 to learn important Family Center dates. Watch your email for upcoming events sponsored by our Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and our Parents As Teachers (PAT) program. Mark your calendar now for our Tons of Fun Vehicle Fair on Saturday, September 26 at 9:00 a.m. by the football field behind our Gay Ave. campus.

We are eager to begin the school year!

Sincerely,

Amy Perry
Director

District Connections and School Offerings

The Family Center is the early childhood and family resource component for the School District of Clayton. We opened our doors in 1975 out of a commitment to support the growth, development and well-being of parents and children in our community. This public school program model of parenting and early childhood education has inspired many similar programs in the St. Louis area and throughout the country.

Families participate in an array of programs offered.

- **Early Childhood Education**: We offer early childhood preschool programs for children 15 months through kindergarten entry.
- **Parenting Workshops**: We offer workshops for parents of children 0-18 years of age, on a range of topics from toddler tantrums to the tricky teen years. We read and discuss topics of interest, frequently based on books from our extensive parenting library.
- **Parent Coaching:** We offer short-term parent coaching for families who could use a neutral, compassionate ear and some fresh parenting strategies.
- **Parents as Teachers:** This is a free program for parents and children prenatal through kindergarten entry. A parent educator will visit you in your home, at the Family Center, or in a virtual meeting to discuss parenting questions, offer community resources and share developmental information to prepare you for upcoming milestones. PAT also offers annual developmental screening and fun family events.
- **Stay, Play and Learn:** This playtime for parents, grandparents, caregivers and children ages birth to kindergarten entry meets in our open and airy playroom full of places to climb, draw, pretend, paint, build with blocks, make friends and much more!
- **Early Childhood Special Education:** The School District of Clayton provides free and appropriate education to children identified as eligible according to the MO state education plan.

For more information about Parents as Teachers, browse our Family Center website or email marycelinahaupt@claytonschools.net.

The Clayton School District is a PK-grade 12 school district. Our early childhood curriculum is linked to the District elementary curriculum. Family Center staff members serve on District curriculum, professional development and other leadership committees.

Family Center Contact Information

Office Hours:	Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Family Center:	314-854-6900 (dial 0 to reach the front desk)
Kid Zone office:	314-854-6910

Clayton Schools' Family Center Website

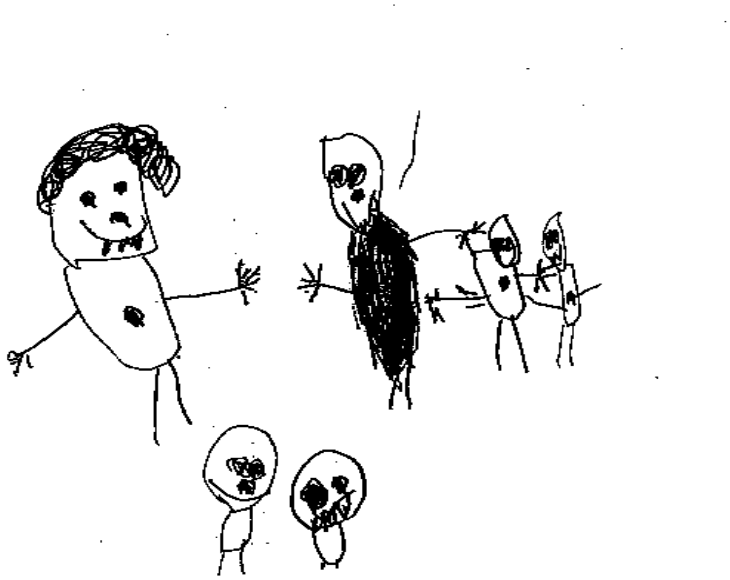
To access the Family Center website:

- Open an internet browser and go to www.claytonschools.net.
- At the top right corner, click on "Schools".
- A list of the schools will drop down; click on Family Center.

Find us on Instagram: @claytonfamilycenter

@familycenterpto

@claytonparentsasteachers



School Year Calendar 2026 -2027

Monday, August 24	Early Childhood Education visit day (Three-, Four-, Five-Morning and Three, Four and Five Full Day classes)
Tuesday, August 25	Two-Morning Early Childhood Education visit day
Friday, September 4	No School - Professional Learning for staff
Monday, September 7	No School - Labor Day (Center closed)
Friday, October 9	No School – Conference Prep Day
Thursday, October 15	Early Release at 12:00 p.m. - Parent/Teacher Conferences
Friday, October 16	No School - Conference Comp Day (Center closed)
Tuesday, November 3	No School - Professional Learning for staff
November 25-27	Thanksgiving Break (Center closed)
Wed, Dec 23 – Tue, Jan. 4	Winter Break (Center closed)
Tuesday, January 5	All classes and programs resume
Friday, January 15	No School. - Professional Learning for staff
Monday, January 18	No School – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (Center closed)
Thursday, January 28	No School for Two Morning classes – Conference Prep
Thursday, February 4	No School for Two Morning classes – Parent/Teacher Conferences
Friday, February 12	No School – Professional Learning for staff
Monday, February 15	No School – Presidents Day (Center closed)
Friday, March 5	No School – Conference Prep Day
Friday, March 12	Early Release at 12:00 – Parent/Teacher conferences
March 15 - March 19	Spring Break (Center closed)
Friday, March 26	No School – Conference Comp Day (Center closed)
Tuesday, April 6	No School – Professional Learning for staff
Friday, April 30	No School – Professional Learning for staff
Monday, May 31	No School - Memorial Day (Center closed)
Wednesday, June 2	Last Day for Three-Morning Classes
Thursday, June 3	Early Release - Last day for Two, Four and Five-Morning, and Three, Four, and Five Full Day Classes

Programs

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program

Our play-based and integrated curriculum is influenced by Missouri Early Learning Standards, the National Association for the Education of Young Children and current child development theory. We are inspired by the innovative public preschool system of Reggio Emilia, Italy that emphasizes respect for each child and the child's ability to influence his or her own learning. Children's prior experiences, backgrounds and early theories are starting points for this inquiry-based education.

We believe young children learn to make sense of their world through play, exploration, inquiry, collaboration and interaction with others, including peers, teachers, families and their environment. When given the time and space for play, children practice regulating their emotions and further develop their social and cognitive skills while gaining self-confidence to engage in new experiences. We invite children to explore and solve problems independently or in small groups where cooperation, collaboration and disagreements intermix through an environment that is rich with possibilities and provocations.

We believe in reciprocal learning relationships among children, teachers and families. We value all children's capabilities and intelligence, teachers as researchers, and families as their child's first teachers. We are a community of learners. Children, teachers and families work together to create trust and connections with others and the environment that surrounds them.

Daily Experiences

Through daily play, children learn and practice the social-emotional and problem-solving skills they will use throughout their lives. Children eat snack, make plans for their day during morning meeting, listen to stories, play in the classroom, and explore outdoor spaces, including our playgrounds, local parks and nature areas. We offer opportunities to explore block construction, dramatic play, drawing and writing, as well as music and movement, and science and nature exploration. Children take responsibility for caring for their classroom and their friends.

Teachers carefully listen to and observe children. Children's current understandings and ideas are shared with families through a classroom blog. This process supports children as they revisit and reflect on their experiences. It also makes the children's learning visible to families.

Children in the full school day classes have additional time to explore, play and eat lunch. Afternoon rest is also part of the daily routine in full day classes.

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

Parent Educators are a vital part of The Family Center, woven into the fabric of care, support and education we provide for children and families. Certified in child development by the state of Missouri and employed by the Clayton School district, parent educators observe and collaborate on an on-going basis with you and your child's classroom teachers to help your child feel welcome, make friends, and thrive at school.

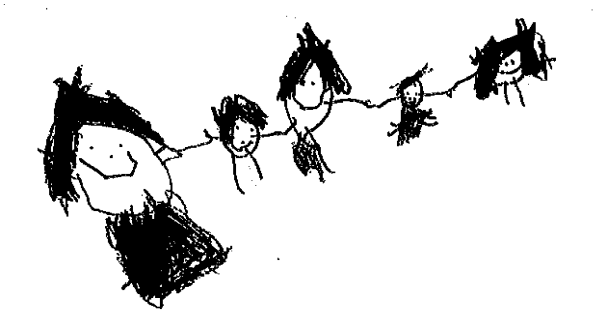
Outside of school we provide family support through regular visits with children and parents. Through engaging activities and stories, we build upon the skills you already have to support your child's development and prepare you for upcoming milestones. There is always time for you to ask questions about challenging situations you are facing with your child and problem solve best approaches.

Each Family Center family is paired with a parent educator. Your parent educator will reach out to you at the beginning of the school year to introduce themselves, tell you more about the program, and discuss how we can work together to best support your child during their time at the Family Center.

We're looking forward to getting to know you and sharing in the joy of watching your child learn and grow in this joyful community we call The Family Center.
*(*PAT is a free program for all Clayton families.) Follow us on Instagram @ claytonparentsasteachers for upcoming events. Click here to view a short video about Parents as Teachers on the district website.*

Parents as Teachers is a state sponsored and school district supported program for expectant parents and parents of young children who have not yet begun kindergarten. All residents of the School District of Clayton as well as families enrolled in our preschool may participate. New families may enroll at any time during the year.

Enroll by contacting the Family Center at 314-854-6910 or complete the application on our website. Access Parents as Teachers on the Family Center website.



Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

Parents of children who are 3-5 years old or approaching 3, who suspect their child may have a developmental delay that may affect them educationally, should contact their PAT parent educator. Families not participating in PAT should contact the Family Center directly at 314-854-6900.

Stay, Play & Learn

Stay, Play & Learn is a wonderful gathering place for adults, and a fun, educational place for young children to explore. Children use big muscles to climb and slide on the climber, learn about spatial relationships as they build tall block towers or have fun creating masterpieces with paint or clay in the art studio. Imaginations are engaged in the play kitchen where a child can “cook” dinner or play dress up. Social skills are enhanced as children practice taking turns with a favorite toy or the rocking horse. Digging in the sand table with a friend is all kinds of fun for the senses. For a little slower pace, our library provides a quiet corner to read one of our many wonderful children’s books. The perfect book on bedtime routines, temper tantrums or fun, family meals can be found there too, along with a wide variety of other helpful titles for parents. In addition to all this great learning, Stay, Play & Learn is a place to meet and make new friends. They might be from your neighborhood or from anywhere in the big wide world. You may hear Russian, Mandarin, Spanish, French or many other languages, given the rich ethnic diversity of our community.

Friendly staff and parent educators are on hand to welcome you, introduce you to new friends, suggest a great parenting book or discuss any parenting questions you might have. Parents and caregivers supervise their own children. Each play session ends with clean up and special Family Center songs.

Visit the Stay, Play & Learn page on our website or call 314-854-6900 for up-to-date information about our sessions, membership fees, including the preschool discount, and program times.

Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)

The PTO is a fantastic way to directly impact and improve our school. Enhance your children's education, network with other parents, connect to the Family Center, and build friendships! All are invited to monthly PTO meetings. Parents receive membership information and opportunities for participation upon preschool enrollment. Meeting dates are listed on the PTO page on the District website.

Kid Zone Before and After School Care Program

Clayton Kid Zone Program is based on the idea that the before-and after-school experience is an extension of the child's school day. Staff works in collaboration with the building level administrators, counselors, support staff and teachers to ensure a smooth transition from one experience to the other. Children experience similar expectations, school guidelines, caring adults, and quality materials and equipment.

Kid Zone morning hours are 7:30-8:45/9:00 a.m. for all classes and afternoon hours are 3:15-5:30 p.m. for the full school day classes only.

Family Center Policies and Guidelines

School District of Clayton Student Illness Guidelines

We are aware of how difficult it is to decide whether or not to attend a Family Center program because you or your child may be ill and/or contagious. However, for the protection of everyone at the Center we ask you to take a conservative approach in making this decision. Please review the School District of Clayton Student Illness Guidelines when determining whether or not to send your child to school.

If you are in doubt, wait another day or two before returning to the Center. For the ECE program, if a child becomes ill during class, the parent or caregiver will be called. For your child's well-being and the health of others, please pick up your child as quickly as possible. Your child along with a staff member or school nurse will wait in a quiet area for your arrival. For parenting classes and Stay, Play and Learn, the staff will ask you to leave if they feel your child is not feeling well and/or may be infecting other children.

Please report any communicable diseases such as COVID-19, strep throat, chickenpox, etc. to the nurses' office for the protection of all children. If you have any questions about your child's attendance at school, contact the office at 854-6900.

Early Childhood Education Class Information

Personal Visits

Before the beginning of the school year, teachers meet with families during a personal visit at the child's home or at school. This is an opportunity for teachers and families to meet and get to know each other before the first day of school. During these conversations, teachers talk about the school day, share any additional materials and answer questions. Teachers will contact parents to schedule the personal visits.

Home-School Connections and Communications

Your participation in our school and your child's class is essential to its success. We communicate with families in a variety of ways, including Google sites, blog entries, classroom updates, phone call check-ins, conversations at arrival and departure times, and fall and spring conferences. Your input is important; please share your thoughts and ideas with us.

One of the first ways for families to share with us is by completing the questionnaire, *Please Introduce Your Child to Us*, which you will receive before the beginning of the school year. The information you provide will help us get to know your child and support his/her learning and development.

Notifications

Each school year brings challenges, opportunities and last-minute changes, requiring patience and flexibility. As changes arise, Clayton will communicate using its automated system for phone calls, emails and texts. Please make sure your contact information is up to date at the Family Center, as well as your emergency contacts, and watch for updates to ensure you stay informed.

Social Emotional Learning

For many children, the first days of school are exciting, but some children may need time to warm up, especially during this time. We will work closely with you and your child on this transition from home to school. Please know that we provide a warm, nurturing, play-filled environment for learning and have many years of experience supporting young children in their growth and development.

Arrival and Dismissal

We strive to have a safe, joyful arrival and dismissal time each day. Thank you for partnering with us to make these times a good experience for families and children.

Our parking areas are very busy, especially at arrival and departure times. Please use extra caution. It is difficult to see children, especially when cars are backing up in the parking lot. Hold your child's hand as you walk in the parking lot.

It is NEVER safe to leave children unattended in your car, even if they are secured in a car seat.

Please do not bring pets into the school or on our playgrounds.

Arrival: Please arrive on time. This facilitates a positive day for your child and for the entire group. If you happen to arrive a few minutes early, you might take a short walk or share a book with your child in the car.

Please call the office or email your child's teachers in advance if your child will be absent or arrive late. Arrival time for the morning classes is 9:00. Arrival time for the full day classes is 8:45.

If you arrive at school late, please come to the upper level front door. The office staff will assist you and your child.

Each classroom will have a designated entrance door to the school. Classroom teachers will notify parents/guardians of their arrival door or outdoor playground entrance. Teachers will meet you and your child at the door or playground entrance. We want to greet you and your child in a way that makes for a smooth transition between home and school. It is our intent to balance time spent talking to parents and beginning play with children.

Prepare your child ahead of time by explaining your leaving in concrete terms. Remind your child of some of the fun play activities at school. Be calm and positive; your child will take cues from you. Assure your child that you will come back to pick them up. Please say a quick goodbye to your child as they move to the classroom or playground with a teacher. If it is hard for your child to say goodbye, please initiate the physical transition to a teacher, rather than asking the teacher to reach for your child.

You will be asked to provide information for our sign-in sheet. You will also need to provide the name of the person who is picking up your child and, if applicable, your child's lunch choice (bringing or buying), and if they will be going to Kid Zone.

Most children settle in to play a few minutes after their parent leaves. However, if your child continues to cry beyond the time we have mutually agreed upon, we will ask the office to call you. If you haven't heard from the school, you can assume that your child is comfortable and enjoying classroom play. Additional thoughts and strategies related to separation are available by talking to classroom teachers and your PAT parent educator.

Dismissal: It is important that parents/caregivers arrive on time. The children expect you to be there and may worry if you are late. We ask that adults picking up children arrive five minutes before the end of class. Should you need to pick up early, please let us know so we can prepare your child.

Pick up time for children in the birth to three-year-old classes:

Two Morning:	11:30
Three and Five Morning:	11:45

Pick up time for children in the three to five-year-old classes:

Four Morning:	noon
Three, Four and Five Full Days:	3:15

Kid Zone after care for the full day classes is available until 5:30 p.m. for children enrolled in the Kid Zone program.

Late Pick Up Policy

We expect children to be picked up on time. We understand that circumstances beyond your control may prevent your child from being picked up on time. On those rare occasions please call the office as soon as possible, so that the staff can inform the classroom teachers.

If the child is picked up late more than once, the family will be charged $1.00 per minute late. Teachers will record the adult's time of arrival and submit the information to the office. All payments of late fees must be made to the office. If a parent/caregiver is late three times, teachers will inform the Center director, who will contact the parent.

Families of children enrolled in the full day classes may wish to register for the afternoon Kid Zone program. This option provides a place for the child to go if the adult is running late. Please see the Kid Zone options for more information.

Snack and Lunch Time

For snack time, each family provides a healthy peanut and tree nut free snack for their own child. Although serving sizes vary, a general rule of thumb is to think of a portion equal to the size of your child's hand.

Please label the container with your child's name. Write "snack" on the container if your child is also staying for lunch. Try to use containers your child can open. We'll coach older children to open their own containers as possible.

Snack is offered mid-morning. We will all wash hands before and after snack time. Children will eat together.

Both snack time and lunch time will be in the classroom or sometimes, outside in good weather. All snack safety procedures will also be followed during lunch times, including the peanut and tree nut restricted allergy safety policy below. Families with children in classrooms that include lunch time will receive separate information about lunch purchase. Note that Chartwells, our caterer, also follows the District allergy policy.

Family Center Allergy Restrictions- Peanut and Tree Nut

We are a PEANUT and TREE NUT RESTRICTED building. When choosing a peanut/tree nut free snack, it is important to always check the package. It is NOT safe to bring items with these warnings into the Family Center:

“May Contain Peanut or Tree Nuts”
“Processed on shared equipment with Peanuts or Tree Nuts”
“Manufactured in a plant with Peanuts or Tree Nuts”
“Contains Peanut or Tree Nut Ingredients”

No popcorn in classrooms with children under three years of age as it can be a choking hazard.

We will have graham crackers on hand if your child forgets to bring a snack.

Rest Time (full day classes only)

Rest time is an important part of a young child’s day. It gives the children a chance to physically rest and emotionally unwind. Approximately one hour each afternoon provides the children with a time to calm their bodies and recharge for the rest of the day’s learning. Children’s rest mats will be placed using social distance guidelines.

While not all children are expected to sleep, teachers do ask that children stay on their rest mats and maintain a calm and quiet disposition. Children may bring a small blanket, pillow and one small lovie from home to use during this time. Teachers provide a small bag to store these items at school.

The bag will be sent home with parents each week for laundering. Please return the bag and rest materials with your child on the next school day.

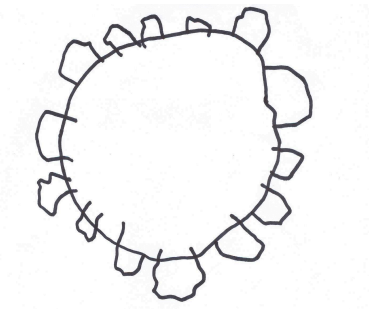
Orientation Visit Day

For the safety of all, this visit is limited to the student, family grown-ups, and siblings. Please bring:

- Your excitement about your child attending the Family Center!
- Any forms needed by the office that have not already been turned in (Authorization to Release, Enrollment, Emergency Information, Immunizations, PTO volunteer form, Sunscreen Permission).
- Rest materials, if applicable (Full day teachers will share more information about rest time.)
- A complete (shirt, pants/shorts, dress/leggings, underwear, socks) labeled change of clothes and diapers (as needed) to leave in your child's cubby
- A labeled bike helmet (for children in 4AM, 5AM and 5 full day classes) to leave at school
- Any questions you may have

The First Day of School

What an exciting day! We are all learning and there will be some Oops! moments. Please bring:



- A filled water bottle
- Your child's snack and lunch, if applicable, packaged in labeled, easy-open containers
- Anything you did not bring to the Orientation Visit Day (Please check previous list)
- Your patience and grace for all of us!

Welcome to the 2026-2027 school year!

Early Release Days

Classes will end at regular class ending time if before noon, or at noon for all other classes, so staff may attend professional development. Kid Zone may be available for the full day class students enrolled in Kid Zone. Please check the Kid Zone calendar.

Dress for Weather

Outdoor play is an essential experience for all children. Please send your child ready for playing on the playground and exploring our nature areas by dressing them in:

- Clothes that can get dirty

- Closed toe shoes with a sturdy grip for running and climbing (avoid sandals, flip flops, or crocs)
- Winter coats/jackets and mittens/gloves or sunhats/hats (as appropriate for weather)

Lovies and Comfort Items

Children may bring comfort items to class. Typically, these include blankets and stuffed animals. All “lovies” need to be clearly marked with your child’s name. Please do not bring bottles; children use sippy or open cups when drinking water at school.

Home/School Communication

An important priority of the School District of Clayton is to establish an atmosphere of open communication between a child’s home and those professional staff members closest to the child. Parent-teacher conferences are encouraged as early as possible when a concern becomes apparent. Under no circumstances should parents feel that honest concerns, openly expressed, will result in unfair reprimand, recrimination or penalty to a student.

Sharing Your Concerns About Clayton Schools/District Communication

The School District of Clayton believes that positive two-way communication with members of the Clayton school community is a vital component to achieving the District’s goals. The District is committed to providing an open environment for individuals to voice their complaints and concerns with the goal of providing parents and patrons with the opportunity to have their concerns addressed appropriately and in a timely manner. This page summarizes the steps that can be taken to ensure easy, consistent and effective communication for parents and staff whenever an issue arises in Clayton’s schools. The District welcomes feedback regarding any Clayton staff member and any District or school activity, but asks individuals to respectfully follow the procedures outlined below when looking to resolve their concerns. Use the questions listed on this page as a way to help clarify your concern and guide you to the appropriate person with whom to share your thoughts.

What type of concern do I have?

Identifying the earliest point at which your concern began will give you an idea of where to begin.

- Classroom or Learning Situation (start with a teacher or principal)
- District Policy or Procedure (start with a District administrator)
- Curriculum Related (start with the principal/director or curriculum coordinator)
- Activities/Athletics (start with a coach or supervisor)
- Programs/Services (Kid Zone, food service, etc.) (start with the program’s director)

Who is the best person to contact?

Identify the person who is closest to or most involved in your concern and start there. It is important that sharing a concern starts at the teacher/building/program level and progresses from that point. A typical progression, should you need to take your concern to each person's immediate supervisor, could look something like this:

- Teacher/Coach/Counselor
- Principal/Director
- District Administrator (Assistant Superintendent or Director)
- Superintendent
- Board of Education

What do I need to do when I raise a concern?

Keep these steps in mind as you prepare to share a concern.

1. Contact the person closest to the problem or issue first.
2. Specifically state your concern or problem.
3. Provide suggestions or recommendations for resolution.
4. If you need to move on to someone else, keep track of whom you've previously approached, when you approached that person and his/her response.
5. Understand that if a concern is about a specific individual, the concern is nearly impossible to resolve without involving that person in the conversation.
6. Assume good will and be patient. Problems cannot always be solved as quickly as we would like. However, the District will work as expediently as it can to address any issue or concern.

What should you expect after you raise a concern?

- Your conversations will be treated with discretion.
- Your concern will be heard without fear of retribution.
- Your concern will be acknowledged within two to three working days.
- A formal response should take no longer than two weeks.
- If your issue cannot be resolved within a reasonable amount of time, the District will clearly outline a timeline for resolving your problem.

Birthday Celebrations

Children's birthdays are an opportunity for the classroom community (children, teachers and parents) to create a unique and meaningful celebration. Classroom teachers will share specific information about how your child's class will celebrate birthdays.

Since this is truly a celebration of the child with their friends at school and not a birthday party, please do not bring party items, such as balloons, a birthday cake, party bags, a gift, or paper products to school.

Nature Education

Children benefit from daily hands-on nature experiences. Our nature educator works collaboratively with children and teachers to care for school gardens and nature areas. These outdoor experiences promote children's observation, investigation and problem solving skills. Children gain knowledge of the living world, foster their imagination and develop a sense of wonder.

Music and Movement

Our music educator will visit each classroom to sing songs, experiment with instruments, and create drama and movement experiences. At other times throughout the day, teachers and children sing favorite songs and finger plays, play instruments, and move to a variety of music.

Curriculum

Our inquiry-based and integrated curriculum is influenced by the Missouri Early Learning Standards, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and current child development theory. We are inspired by the innovative public school system in Reggio Emilia, Italy that emphasized respect for each child and the child's ability to influence his or her own learning. Children's prior experiences, backgrounds and early theories are a starting point for this inquiry-based education.

Each child's learning is supported by the relationships among children, educators, parents and the community. As partners in the learning process, children's wonderings support teachers in framing questions that follow a course of in-depth investigation and learning across multiple disciplines over time. This learning cycle supports a process of self-and collective-discovery when children and teachers represent and communicate learning to others in multiple ways. Teachers listen to and document children's ideas, understandings and strategies through observation. Learning is assessed, extended and deepened through the interpretation of observational data (photographs, video, transcripts of conversations, artifacts that represent children's understandings and feelings).

Our social and physical environments are viewed as the third teacher. Teachers design classroom spaces with intentionality to cultivate learning and relationships. These environments play a significant and powerful role in children's development. Our curriculum framework includes five strands/units of study:

- Social Emotional Development and Approaches to Learning
- Language and Literacy
- Science and Nature Education
- Mathematics
- Music, Movement, and Dramatic Play

Buying Lunch at School

Children enrolled in classes which include lunchtime, may purchase a school lunch from the high school cafeteria. The school lunch program includes a hot entrée, sandwich or bagel option each day. All meals are nutritionally balanced and include milk. Menus are provided each month. Children may also order milk to drink with their lunch from home. Families indicate on the classroom sign-in sheet if their child will be ordering a school lunch that day and will be charged for each lunch purchased. **School lunch orders must be placed by 9:15 a.m. each day**. Call the office, 314-854-6900 to order lunch if your child will be arriving after that time.

If you have any questions concerning the lunch program contact: Chartwells at 314-854-6640.