



Early Learner

The Early Learner curriculum is inspired by the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The curriculum is guided by a belief that children are competent and capable and come to us with experiences, passions, gifts, talents, potentials, and curiosities. The curriculum is an emergent and constant negotiation. Through this negotiation, small and large group projects grow out of the interests of students, teachers, and parents, and evolve from group discussion and interests. Teachers track student interests, questions, and ideas through careful observation and documentation, which is later shared during negotiated curriculum planning with EL teachers and experts from our community, to create authentic extensions and new directions for projects. By embracing multiple perspectives, we encourage more dialogue, debate, and healthy conflict. This image of children being capable thinkers whose ideas should be taken seriously permeates throughout Foothills School. The Early Learner philosophy and approach have become not only the foundation of a comprehensive Foothills education but also a strong influence on the rest of the school.

Image of the Child

We have a strong image of the child as a competent and capable learner from a very young age. We believe that the Early Learner teachers learn from the children and believe that the children come to us with experiences, passions, gifts, talents, potentials, and curiosities. Each child adds a unique perspective and element to our community.

The Environment as the Third Teacher

The classroom environment mirrors our image of the child. The environment provokes questions, play, ideas, discussions, creativity, and learning. Looking around you will see real tools like hammers and nails, high-quality art materials, and real instruments. These, along with natural materials, show the trust we have in children. We teach them how to use and respect the classroom materials.

Documentation

It is through documentation that the Early Learner teachers truly understand the child, their ideas, creations, and discoveries. Documentation is a record of a child's learning and shows their growth, progress, and understanding. In order for the teachers to be able to scaffold the child's learning, we must truly know and understand them. The teachers are continually documenting children's learning through their play. For the children, documentation is a visual memory of their work and can spark new ideas in their projects. For the parents, it helps them become a part of the day and they are able to understand the teacher's perspective.

Participation of the Parents

We value parent perspective, experience, and collaboration. Parents are welcome to be present during the day. Some community-building opportunities for families include weekly newsletter and slideshows, parent meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and check-ins before and after morning and closing meetings.

The Community of Learners

We view the community as a metaphorical triangle with one side representing the child, one side the teacher, and one the parent. All sides are equally important. It is a continual conversation among the children, the teachers, and the parents to encourage dialogue, debate, research, and negotiation.

The Role of the Teacher

Teachers are researchers and learners. Each teacher brings a unique perspective to the community. Collaboration among teachers is an essential element. Teachers often engage in a role of negotiation with the children where they are not trying to give them the answers but helping them discover their own answers. As teachers, we explore, tinker, research, and wonder alongside the children.

The Hundred Languages of Children

The Hundred Languages is a metaphor for the many ways children learn, play, and express themselves. Examples of languages include wire, clay, music, dramatics, math, literacy, and visual arts. Children are encouraged to express their ideas through multiple languages. Each language deserves an equal amount of importance; for example, literacy is not more important than music.

The Negotiated Curriculum

We use a negotiated curriculum that can be described as a ball toss between the children and the teachers. Projects often start with the child while the teachers listen, observe, and ask questions. The teachers provide opportunities for children to extend their ideas. This process often goes back and forth multiple times.

Self-Regulation and Mindfulness

At all grade levels in our school, the children are working on self-regulation and mindfulness. Being able to recognize what emotions you are feeling and to know how to express them is an important skill. We have built-in mindfulness activities throughout our day. Viewing children as competent and capable learners also means that we know that they are able to make decisions about what is best for their bodies. We value children being able to be self-aware and independent in knowing what their body needs; for instance, they can have their morning snack when they are hungry.

Social/Emotional Development

We value an emotionally safe environment for children to be able to express all ranges of emotions, and we respect each child individually for how they communicate their ideas, wants, and needs. This work is done through group dialogue, individual conversations, books, parent partnership, community language, individual plans, and our knowledge of their development.

We value a culture of peaceful conflict resolution by making sure everyone is safe, making space for everyone involved to have their voice heard, active participation in coming up with ideas of how to solve the problem, and checking in or reflecting on strategies that they tried. Teachers are here to support children in moving towards independence in problem-solving.

Home Visits

At the beginning of the year, we do home visits to see the child's first learning environment and to start building a relationship with families. During the home visit, we spend half the time having the child show us what is important to them and then half the time talking to the family. The purpose of the home visit is to learn about the child, their interests, who they are as a learner, and to get to know the family culture. The home visits help us understand our new community. After the home visits, we come back together as an Early Learner team to share what we learned, as well as to look at the environment of the classroom to see if any changes should be made to reflect the incoming communities' interests.

Projects

A project may be a child's single interaction with materials, such as an individual child building with Magna-tiles or it may be an ongoing group interest in the exploration of color over the course of several months. Sometimes projects begin and have no end, while others may have a final product or point of completion. Projects can also be fluid and integrated, extending throughout several areas of the classroom or across different content areas. For example, when an Early Learner is designing and constructing a structure with Legos or coming back to

their work each day to explore, question, research, and build on their interests in group collaboration, this is all important project work.

Project Example in Early Learners:
The Mapping Project

Content Areas

The Early Learner program is designed as a two-year program and within those two years, the children have the opportunity to be exposed to the following learning outcomes:

Language Arts

Reading

- Use books and written materials to gain information and enjoyment
- Recognize letters as special symbols to represent spoken language
- Understand information from reading books and looking at pictures

Speaking and Listening

- Use communication with the purpose to convey a message
- Use basic conventions of grammar and syntax
- Use phrases and sentences with functional and descriptive vocabulary
- Respond verbally and non-verbally to verbal and gestural communication
- Understand messages in conversations, directions, music, and stories
- Understand the value in hearing others' perspectives, solutions, and ideas

Writing

- Make scribbles, pictures, and symbols with meaning
- Know that languages and words can be in written form
- Begin to write and draw to communicate language
- Use tools to write and draw with increasing coordination

Math

Number and Operations

- Begin to match quantity to number symbol
- Recognize and begin to write whole numbers to 10
- Count 10 objects
- Begin to add and subtract single digits

- Begin to compare numbers using the terms “greater than” and “less than”

Algebra

- Describe and construct patterns

Measurement

- Begin to use non-standard and standard tools for measurement

Geometry

- Identify basic two- and three-dimensional shapes

Data Analysis and Probability

- Begin to analyze and record data

Music

Performing Skills

- Perform in front of peers on a small and larger scale a learned and or improvised piece through singing and/or playing percussion instruments

Tools and Knowledge

- Be exposed to basic note values and symbols of music
- Be introduced to music vocabularies such as tempo, dynamics, and pitch
- Begin composing music using systems of notation

Historical and Cultural Content

- Be exposed to a variety of music genres and cultural expressions of music
- Be exposed to a variety of instruments such as voice, percussion, string, woodwind, and brass
- Be exposed to the various careers and roles in the music industry including performing, composing, and conducting

Appraising Skills

- Begin to learn how to reflect and communicate about their own musical working process
- Begin to analyze and critically assess their performances and compositions

Listening Skills

- Be exposed to musical elements such as timbre, melody, structure and rhythm
- Begin to critically listen and identify times where music enhances or demonstrates mood
- Begin to identify high and low pitches

Performing Arts

Creating

- Explore locomotor and non-locomotor movements
- Improvise dance with starts and stops
- Engage in dance experience alone, with a partner and in a group
- Identify parts of the body

Performing

- Identify and demonstrate directions for moving the body in space, exploring level, moving forward and back, as well as spinning
- Identify the speed of dance as fast and slow as well as varied rhythm
- Move with opposing characteristics (i.e. loose/tight, light/heavy, jerky/smooth)
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of spatial relationships
- Identify and move body parts and repeat movements upon request
- Dance for others in a designated area or space
- Use a simple prop as a part of a dance

Responding

- Identify a movement in dance by repeating it
- Observe a movement and share impressions
- Demonstrate an observed or performed dance movement
- Find a movement in a dance that was fun to watch. They will repeat it and explain why it is fun to do and watch

Connecting

- Recognize an emotion expressed in a dance movement that is watched or performed
- Observe a dance work, identify imitate a movement from that dance and ask a question about the dance
- Show a dance movement experienced at home or elsewhere

Science

- Begin to make observations building on prior experience
- Begin to use counting and numbers to identify and describe patterns in the natural and designed world(s)
- Begin to compare predictions (based on prior experiences) to what occurred (observable events)
- Begin to record information (observations, thoughts, and ideas)
- Begin to use and share pictures, drawings, and/or writings of observations

Social Studies

Cultures

- Begin to understand what the word culture means as a way to describe a person's life experience

Communities

- Begin to understand there are diverse ways of speaking and living throughout the world

Visual Arts

Develop Craft

- Be introduced to a variety of tools and media in the art studio
- Be shown how to care for the tools and materials in the art studio

Understand Art Worlds

- Begin to understand the difference between abstract and representational art

Engage and Persist

- Be encouraged to slow down their artistic processes, making sure to include important details that will help others interpret their art and understand what they are trying to communicate

Stretch and Explore

- Be encouraged to create multiple drafts of their work and make their work "readable" to others

Reflect

- Be asked to talk about their artwork with teachers and peers

Express

- Use artistic expression and language to communicate emotions and make meaning of experiences
- Understand that visual art is a powerful way for them to communicate their ideas to others

Observe

- Be given many opportunities to draw what they see as opposed to what is in their minds