

## Introduction

Charlestown Early Learning Center was founded on the belief that young children learn by doing. We believe that children learn through interactions with other children, interactions with adults, and interaction with objects. We believe that play is the vehicle by which these interactions will take place, and will provide the most high quality learning experiences. We come to these beliefs through the vast research done by such child development theorists as Piaget, Vygotsky, Erickson, and Loris Malaguzzi.

Through becoming actively involved with their environment, children learn to make sense of their world. By spontaneously engaging in activities appropriate to their age and development, children add information to what they already know, develop new understanding and construct new knowledge. CELC will provide developmentally appropriate activities and experiences, keeping in mind the nine learning domains of RIELDS, and will provide each child the opportunity to interact with caring, qualified teachers who will support their unique learning style and individuality. We will respect each child for their individuality, ability and/or disabilities, and make adaptations to the curriculum to ensure that they receive the most positive educational experience. We believe in educating the whole child; for each child is a social, emotional, cognitive, and physical being. We strive to meet each individual child where they are developmentally and to tailor our approach to best support positive outcomes for him/her.

We believe in a partnership between school and home, as every child brings with them the history of his or her family and environment. We encourage family participation at every level of our program. We consider all families to be a part of our Parent Advisory Group, and look to the PAG for input on programs that will affect positive outcomes for their children.

We expect the highest standard for our teaching staff, and respect each individual for the strengths that they bring to our program, and to the families that we serve. We encourage professional development, and support staff improvement. Knowledge of child growth and development is essential for making decisions about appropriate curriculum content for groups of children and individual children.

We believe in supporting a feeling of self-worth for our staff, and for the children and families that we serve. If an individual is happy with him or herself, he or she is able to meet each new challenge with self-confidence and a desire to learn. We encourage the quest for knowledge in every child and adult in our program.

## I. Content

*The Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards* is the curriculum vehicle which drives implementation of a quality program at CELC. We also utilize *The Creative Curriculum*, to support our planning and teaching. Play is the “work” of the young child and is the vehicle which drives all curriculum standards and lesson plans.

Teaching staff will be expected to be knowledgeable about the RIELDS, and to write lesson plans that specifically align with them; pointing out which learning domains are being supported and developed within an activity or experience. Continual understanding and study of the RIELDS will be supported through professional development, staff meetings, and planning sessions. RIELDS resource materials will be available to all staff to help meet this goal.

CELC supports the nine learning domains of the growing child in the following ways:

### ***Physical Health and Motor Development***

-By designing activities and experiences that develop and enhance both gross motor and fine motor skills, teachers support the physical growth of the child.

-Teachers encourage autonomy in caring for the self. Children are supported in the power of taking care of his/her physical needs safely and effectively.

### ***Social and Emotional Development***

-Children are supported in the development of meaningful and positive relationships with other children and teachers.

-Teachers encourage the positive development of the sense of self and overall attitude toward life.

-Children are given time and support to express and regulate their emotions.

### ***Language Development***

-Each day, children are given ample opportunities to participate in and develop

increasingly complex language.

-Through modeling and instruction, children will be exposed to conversational and social conventions.

-For English Language Learners, teachers will meet the child where he/her is and encourage the gradual proficiency and understanding of English, while honoring the child's first language and culture.

### ***Literacy***

-Through story, song, and play, children will gain phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print knowledge.

-Teachers will support appreciation and understanding of a variety of literacy experiences.

-Children will be given opportunities to engage in writing and drawing as a way to represent thoughts and ideas.

### ***Cognitive Development***

-Children will be given ample time to be met with problems and use knowledge and past experience to solve them.

-Support will be given to children to develop the ability to give attention and persistence to a task.

-Teachers will support children in the ability to adjust to changing circumstances, transitions, and allow for different perspectives to be seen.

### ***Mathematics***

-Through the experience of play, children will be given the opportunity to develop math concepts such as number sense, operations, geometry, measurement, classification, and patterning.

### ***Science***

-Children will participate in investigations while making predictions and

-Children will participate in investigations while making predictions and evaluating outcomes.

-Children will explore the natural world and be encouraged to make connections about living and non-living objects and materials.

### ***Social Studies***

-Beginning with the self, children will develop the understanding of their relationship to the family, the community, and the world.

-Children will be encouraged to recognize and respect similarities and differences between people and practices.

### ***Creative Arts***

-Children will be given ample opportunities to explore various materials and tools in the Art Studio.

-Teachers will encourage the child to use the materials as he/she chooses, creating artwork that is entirely from him/her.

-Each day, children will be exposed to song and dance, and each child's own experience with it will be honored.

## **II. Context**

### ***Environment***

A classroom environment that fosters optimum growth and development for young children involves physical space both inside and outside of a classroom that has

been arranged to support learning in all of the nine Learning Domains. It should be arranged to support large and small group interactions as well as individual learning. It should be planned to accommodate children of all abilities and be inclusive of children with special needs. Staff should be able to see all children in the room at a glance. There needs to be a space for individual belongings, places to be with friends, and to be alone; a well-lit, comfortable atmosphere of peace and belonging. There should be designated spaces for quiet activities as well as room for noisier, messier experiences. Furnishings should be situated so that traffic patterns discourage interference with activities and centers.

### ***Indoors***

Children and teachers spend a great deal of time in a classroom each day, and it should be a place that all who enter feel welcome and secure. Centers should be set up to foster the growth of positive relationships between children, and between children and teachers.

Activities, books, and classroom décor should reflect the lives of the children and their families, with items familiar to the children and photographs of the children during play/work activities. The classroom should reflect the children in the display of their artwork at their eye level. The environment shall also reflect the diversity found in the school and community, and respect the age, gender, culture, and ability of all who come into the classroom.

*Classroom Centers- the classroom should be set up into Play Centers.*

*Suggestions for such Centers are:*

*Block Center-* There should be substantial room and enough blocks for four children to build structures in this center. Different building materials and accessories should be rotated in and out of the block center in addition to the permanent collection of unit blocks and hollow blocks. It should be set up near other noisier centers, such as Dramatic Play.

*Dramatic Play/Family Living-* This center should be set up with child-size home furniture, play food, dishes, baby dolls, dress-up clothes that reflect all genders, and

other accessories. Themes and accessories should change every now and then according to the children's interests.

*Art Studio-* This center should be equipped with accessible art supplies for the children to use independently. There should also be space and a variety of supplies to accommodate teacher-led art experiences.

*Library/Listening Center-* There should be a variety of books available to the children in this center, and they should be rotated often. Cozy chairs, soft toys and rugs should be included to add to an inviting atmosphere. A listening station with headphones can be included for children to listen to music and stories.

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*Writing Center-* This should be a table, to accommodate 2-4 children, supplied with a variety of writing/drawing tools and paper. Children's mailboxes may be close by, as well as visual aids such as a written alphabet and word cards.

*Science Center-* This center should change frequently, with displays of natural, physical, and life science experiences, books, and pictures for the children to explore.

*Math/Literacy Toys and Table Games-* Shelves should be stocked with small block collections, puzzles, literacy and math games, manipulatives, and small dramatic play sets. Children should be able to choose these independently and bring them to a table or rug to play.

### ***Outdoors***

The outdoor play space at CELC is used by the children every day. In the morning session, children will spend 30-45 mins in all types of weather outside. Children staying all day will have a second 30-45 minute outdoor play time. Materials chosen for outside play should reflect the idea that anything that can be done inside, can also be done outside.

*Sand area-* The sand area is set up with baskets of buckets, shovels, and other sand toys, as well as a collection of large dinosaurs and trucks. There is a water spout available to the children during warmer weather to add to the play.

*Water Tables-* Two water tables (waterfall and standing water) are available to the children during warmer weather.

*Trike/wagon track-* There are tricycles and wagons available to the children to ride along a paved trike track.

*Big Blocks/Playhouse-* The playhouse is situated next to a collection of outdoor hollow blocks, so that the children may build other structures to extend their play.

*Grass Hill/Slide-* There is a small hill for children to roll down, sit with friends, or slide down the built-in slide.

*Vegetable Garden/compost-* Children help teachers tend the classroom garden, and compost food waste from snacks and lunch.

*Balance/Climbing -* Various large rocks, stumps, and a balance beam are situated throughout the outdoor playspace for children to use.

*Covered Porch-* The covered porch runs the length of the school, and is equipped with various rotating materials. Some examples are: dollhouses, measuring materials,

binoculars, bins of books, wooden trains, painting easel, sidewalk chalk, and sit-down scooters.

### **Schedules**

The daily, weekly, and yearly schedules for the classroom need to be responsive to children's changing needs, and yet be predictable and constant. It should provide a frame for the school curriculum. Children need to develop a sense of organization; they need to know what comes next, what is expected, and what boundaries are in place for them. A daily schedule will include:

- predictable routines, with flexibility to accommodate spontaneity
  - a balance of active and quiet activities
  - alternating whole group, small groups, and individual activities,
  - a balance of familiar and new activities
  - time for reflection and revisiting experiences
  - quiet/down time
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- transition times will be planned so that children are engaged while transitioning (ex- name games when calling children away from circle to get ready for outside play)

### **Sample Daily Schedule**

(schedule may vary between classrooms depending on classroom needs)

- 8:30-9:00 Arrival- Teachers greet families as they arrive. Children have free choice/all centers are open.
- 9:00-9:30 Morning Meeting: Whole Group: Greeting, stories, songs, planning for

the day's activities.

- 9:30-10:10 Outdoor Play
- 10:15-10:30 Snack Time
- 10:30-11:30 Center Time- Children have free choice/all centers are open.
- 11:30-11:40 Clean-up
- 11:40-12:00 Closing Meeting: Whole Group: Stories, Music/Movement, Conversations, etc.
- 12:00 Dismissal of ½ day children

*Extended day begins*

- 12:00-12:35 Lunch
- 12:35-12:45 Bathroom/prepare for resting time
- 12:45-1:30 Quiet Rest Time- Children rest quietly on their cots. They may read books or play with soft toys.
- 1:30-2:00 Outdoor play (Children that fell asleep may continue to nap inside)
- 2:00-3:00 Center Time-Children have free choice/all centers are open

*Children are picked up for dismissal anytime between 2 and 3.*

**Materials**

Materials and equipment should be intentionally chosen by the teacher to support all children's learning, interests, and skill levels. They should be open-ended and provide children with the opportunity to develop skills across all domains. They should reflect the lives of children and their families, and should encourage exploration, experimentation, and discovery. Whenever possible, high quality and durable toys made with natural materials (ex.-wood, cotton, silk) should be chosen over similar toys made with plastic.

Materials should be organized to help children explore and learn. The

environment should change throughout the year to reflect children's changing interests and skill levels, yet remain constant and familiar to maintain a sense of security and ownership for all who use the classroom. The natural world should be a part of the classroom with the inclusion of plants and pets, and comfortable furniture and soft toys should be included to bring the coziness of home into the classroom. It should be a place where people, both adults and children, want to spend time. Toys and materials should be stored in open containers on low shelves and be accessible to the children to use independently, and/or to support their developing independence. Activities should be available at many developmental levels to reflect the different levels of growth of the children within the group. Puzzles, books, dolls, posters, songs, games, and other materials shall reflect the diversity within the school and society.

***Differentiated Instruction*** should be evident in materials and activities that the teachers choose to set out each day. There should be multiple paths by which children of differing abilities, interests, and learning needs can meet with success. Materials should be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children in the group, as well as to the teachers. There should be opportunity for peer teaching and cooperative teaching and play. Children will have more responsibility and ownership for their academic growth.

### ***Group Size***

Class size will not exceed 18 children. There will be a teacher and a teaching assistant at all times, as well as a third teaching assistant during Center Time.

The structure of the day will allow for a variety of small group activities (up to 4 children in most of the centers), as well as whole groups during Meeting times, and several opportunities for children to work alone.

## III. Process

### ***Pedagogical Influences***

CELC believes that children should be in an environment where play is of the utmost importance. Since children are a product of the environment from which they come, and healthy learning and development is the desired outcome, it is essential to be aware of family history, health history, and other factors when becoming a part of their day to day life. Through the work of B.F. Skinner, we understand that environment shapes behavior, and that the process of learning involves a change in behavior. Through family questionnaires and interviews at

involves a change in behavior. Through family questionnaires and interviews at registration, CELC strives to see a picture of the child's life before preschool to fully inform their journey with us.

We believe that children learn by reconstructing concepts through efforts towards mastery. Learning will be achieved best when driven by children's interests, social interactions, play, and developmental needs. When teaching young children, we should be aware of each child's unique needs and abilities. We come to these beliefs through the research of Constructivists such as Jean Piaget, Friedrich Froebels, and Lev Vygotsky.

We believe that the teacher is the observer, and, through preparing the learning environment, guides the child to his or her own self-directed development. This is informed through the work of Maria Montessori. It is our belief that children should have the freedom to choose their own learning path. We embrace the idea of an Emergent Curriculum. By observing and listening to the children in our care, we are able to follow the interests of the children, thus making their learning personal and meaningful. By following the model of education in Reggio Emilia, and studying the writings of Loris Malaguzzi, we honor the pathways taken by children, and the opportunities that emerge as a result.

### *Importance of Play*

The guiding principle of our program at CELC is the belief that children learn through play. Children should have the opportunity to explore their environment, manipulate the materials set out for them, and have the freedom and time to do so. Teachers should prepare an environment where play opportunities are purposeful and intentional, while reflecting the children's cultural context, interests and learning styles.

Along with preparing the environment and observing the children and the pathways that they are taking, teachers should play with the children. This gives them an opportunity to model appropriate play and social interactions. Play is the natural instinct of children, and should be honored and supported by teachers and caregivers.

### *Understanding Learning Styles*

A child should be supported in a learning environment that honors his or her natural and individual temperament, as temperament is one of the factors that influences how children experience their world. Teachers should strive to understand all the different ways a child can learn, for example, "is a child an auditory learner, a kinesthetic learner, a visual learner?" They should be able to approach a child in such

a way that their learning strengths are embraced and their learning challenges are supported.

A child's ability to cope with change, his/her emotional response to stress and frustration, and social comfort can all have an effect on his/her learning journey, and should be understood by teachers and caregivers.

#### IV. Teaching and Facilitating

##### ***The Role of Teaching Staff at CELC***

The staff at CELC is valued for their individuality, creativity, and their expertise. They are the foundation for the children that we serve. Each staff person receives a CELC Staff Handbook and Orientation upon being hired. Each year, prior to the beginning of the school year, all new and returning staff meet to review the *Staff Handbook*, the *Child Abuse and Neglect Documents*, and the *CELC Curriculum Framework*. Additionally, the staff reviews the RIELDS and corresponding assessment materials (currently, *Work Sampling System* by Pearson is being used).

In our program, although there is a distinction between our Lead Teachers and Teaching Assistants, and there are different educational policies/job descriptions for

Teaching Assistants, and there are different educational policies/job descriptions for both, when working together in the classroom, our goal is to have a seamless unity between staff. With enough care in planning and implementing the RIELDS, and preparing a classroom environment that is conducive to learning, a visitor in the classroom should find it difficult to notice the difference between staff members; “who is the teacher? Who is the Assistant?). Instead they should see a busy, productive, child-centered classroom. They should observe positive interaction between children and teachers and notice them working together in exploration and discovery.

It is probably a teacher’s greatest challenge to be able to observe, identify, and plan curriculum that will accommodate all of the children in a class. Within each group of children there is a wide array of developmental differences, levels of readiness, learning styles, cultural and linguistic differences, and special needs. A

teacher must be able to create a differentiated curriculum to accommodate a class of diverse children. A “one size fits all” approach will hold some children back, while overwhelming others.

Teachers must learn to be skillful listeners and observers, “kid watchers”; knowing when to step in and wait to hear a child’s observations and insights before imparting new information. They must be able to help children extend their own ideas and thoughts through inquiry and scaffold their learning by meeting them where they are comfortable being challenged.

The role of the teacher is multi-faceted and multi-tasked. A variety of teaching strategies should be used in order to reach all of the ability levels in the classroom. Research has shown that the interrelationship between child and teacher is a critical component of teaching and facilitating. The qualities of these interactions have a significant impact on child outcomes. We strive to reach the highest standards set forth in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and revisit the literature often as a staff to ensure they are being met.

Classroom teachers and assistants should strive to create a warm, inviting classroom space that encourages learning and exploration. Children should feel safe to learn, grow, and share. Teachers should strive to deeply know each child in their classroom, and work toward an emotional connection. They should enjoy spending time with one another, and children should be supported to feel comfortable and connected to each other. There should be a positive environment in the classroom, soft voices, smiles, and genuine interest in the children. Teachers should encourage social conversation by getting down to the child’s level and asking follow-up questions when he/she volunteers information.

Through intentional grouping based on knowledge of children’s strengths and being sensitive to their needs, teachers should guide the class from a group of individual children at the beginning of their pre-school journey to a cohesive

community of learners by the time they move on to kindergarten.

Teachers are expected to follow a daily schedule that will be posted for each classroom, and will be specific to the individual group. They should establish daily routines to provide a sense of security for the children, while having the ability to be flexible when change is warranted. Teachers will be expected to plan for the class according to individual children's learning goals and needs, as well as keeping in mind the "big picture" of the classroom as a cohesive unit. Lesson plans will be expected to align with the RIELDS to ensure that the *whole child* is being planned for, and all the learning domains are being strengthened. Lead Teachers in a classroom will collaborate with Assistant Teachers, working together to plan quality and meaningful

learning experiences. The teaching team should meet weekly and talk daily for this purpose.

Teachers will use ongoing assessment of children's learning and development to plan for the class. Assessment must be authentic and varied and relevant to the child being assessed. The assessment program chosen for teachers at CELC is *Work Sampling System* by Pearson, which aligns with the RIELDS. Teachers will keep a portfolio for each child. Through observation, note-taking, gathering and analysis of children's work, focus photographs, family questionnaires, and Child Outreach screening, teachers will formulate measurable learning goals for each child. These goals will be kept in mind when creating the broader lesson plans for the class. Teachers will be expected to keep the families informed of their children's learning and development, and offer parent/teacher conferences in the winter and spring, and at any other time when requested.

It is expected that all teachers and teaching assistants participate in a yearly self-assessment, which will be discussed with a supervisor. Together they will determine strengths and any areas in need of improvement. Ongoing professional development will be required and encouraged for professional growth and improvement. An Individual Professional Development Plan will be put into place each year as a result of the self-assessment.

### ***Teaching Strategies***

In order to successfully reach each child in the classroom, teachers need to be aware of the varied learning styles, temperaments and needs of the children in their care. When teaching and communicating with the children, teachers should use a variety of strategies to support meaningful learning for all children.

Teachers at CELC are encouraged to employ the Ten Effective DAP teaching strategies as developed by NAEYC. The ten effective strategies are as follows:

1. **Acknowledge** what children do or say. Let children know that we have noticed

by giving positive attention, sometimes through comments, sometimes through just sitting nearby and observing. (*"Thanks for your help, Kavi." "You found another way to show 5."*)

2. **Encourage** persistence and effort rather than just praising and evaluating what the child has done. (*"You're thinking of lots of words to describe the dog in the story. Let's keep going!"*)
3. **Give specific feedback** rather than general comments. (*"The beanbag didn't get all the way to the hoop, James, so you might try throwing it harder."*)
4. **Model** attitudes, ways of approaching problems, and behavior toward others, showing children rather than just telling them (*"Hmm, that didn't work and I need to think about why." "I'm sorry, Ben, I missed part of what you said. Please tell me again."*)
5. **Demonstrate** the correct way to do something. This usually involves a procedure that needs to be done in a certain way (such as using a wire whisk or writing the letter *P*).
6. **Create or add challenge** so that a task goes a bit beyond what the children can already do. For example, you lay out a collection of chips, count them together and then ask a small group of children to tell you how many are left after they see you removing some of the chips. The children count the remaining chips to help come up with the answer. To add a challenge, you could hide the chips after you remove some, and the children will have to use a strategy other than counting the remaining chips to come up with the answer. To **reduce challenge**, you could simplify the task by guiding the children to touch each chip once as they count the remaining chips.
7. **Ask questions** that provoke children's thinking. (*"If you couldn't talk to your partner, how else could you let him know what to do?"*)
8. **Give assistance** (such as a cue or hint) to help children work on the edge of their current competence (*"Can you think of a word that rhymes with your name, Matt? How about bat . . . Matt/bat? What else rhymes with Matt and bat?"*)
9. **Provide information**, directly giving children facts, verbal labels, and other information. (*"This one that looks like a big mouse with a short tail is called a vole."*)
10. **Give directions** for children's action or behavior. (*"Touch each block only once as you count them." "You want to move that icon over here? Okay, click on it and hold down, then drag it to wherever you want."*)

These strategies serve as a way to facilitate learning while children are engaged in their natural state of play. Rather than giving direct instruction and encouraging rote learning and memorization, our goal as teachers is to prepare a learning environment and guide the children to higher levels of thought through inquiry.

When guiding children in this way, teachers will work within the child’s zone of proximal development, a concept introduced by Lev Vygotsky, to ensure that children meet with success, and not frustration. Through a combination of child-initiated and teacher-directed experiences, concepts and skills will be introduced through scaffolding upon already-mastered skills. In this way, children are not under stress, and develop on their own time-line, and at their own pace.

### ***Universal Design and Differentiated Instruction***

*Universal Design for Learning* is “designing early education settings so all children, as equal and valued members of the program, may access and engage in all learning opportunities, learn from a common curriculum according to their individual strengths and abilities, and demonstrate their learning in multiple ways,” (Conn-Powers, Cross, Taub and Hutter-Rishgahi, 2006). This is a valued principle that informs our curriculum at every level of planning and implementation in our program. We ensure that learning materials are accessible to all children, and that teachers present content using multiple methods and formats. For example, when teaching children the alphabet, teachers could include movement and song, in addition to the visual letters.

Teachers will be expected to make accommodations for any child who has special needs, in order for that child to be successful, and to be included in all activities and experiences offered to children.

*Differentiated Instruction* will be achieved at CELC through the use of child assessment aligned with the RIELDS (*Work Sampling System by Pearson* is currently being used). Upon initial and ongoing assessment of children’s learning, teachers will identify individual learning goals for each child in their care. With this knowledge, teachers are able to intentionally put together learning groups when planning small group activities, so that children will be in the optimal position to be challenged and meet with success.

## ***Guidance of Children's Behavior***

Children will be under the supervision of a teacher or teaching assistant at all times. At CELC, we facilitate the development of self-control by using positive guiding techniques by:

- Modeling appropriate behavior
- Redirecting a child's activities
- Setting clear limits and expectations

Teachers purposefully plan activities and discussions that teach social and communications skills. The classroom centers are planned to give enough space for all children, and enough materials are available to minimize potential conflicts. Teachers use conflict resolution techniques and encourage children to talk about their feelings. Teachers encourage children to work out their conflicts by talking with one another and finding a win/win solution to the conflict. Teachers work cooperatively with families to help children to develop self-discipline.

\*We do not believe in punitive measures in dealing with the behaviors of young children.

\*Food and outdoor play will not be used as a reward or consequence of behavior, unless specifically stated in a child's IEP.

\*Outdoor play will never be taken away from a child as a consequence of behavior.

### ***Teachers Response to Behavior***

At Charlestown Early Learning Center, our expectations of children respect their developing needs and abilities. Teachers provide children with many and varied opportunities to develop skills of cooperation, negotiation, and problem solving.

*When dealing with challenging behavior, the staff will:*

- Respond in a way that provides for the safety of the children and adults in the classroom
- Remain calm and focused on the child
- Focus on pro-social behavior and strategies that encourage positive outcomes, including peer modeling and support and changing activities (as opposed to simply trying to eliminate the challenging behavior)
- Communicate with parents/caregivers to find a solution to the problem that will most effectively affect behavior change

-If necessary, and with family support and knowledge, seek additional professional guidance

