

THE DISCOVERY SCHOOL HANDBOOK

Program Philosophy

The philosophy of the Discovery School is based on the image of the child. We see the individual child as having the right to a high-quality education. We respect that the child is the co-constructor of knowledge. This means that the children's interests and their innate curiosity help choreograph our child-centered, nature-based curriculum. We support the children's exploration of their environment as natural researchers, and their need to be interactive learners. We offer children the environment for learning and the provocation to take another look. Our philosophy combines some of the teachings of the greatest educators of our times: Jean Piaget, John Dewey, Erik Erikson, Bev Bos, Becky Bailey, and Reggio Emilia's Loris Malaguzzi. Our environment is structured so that our curriculum is truly child centered, which implies that it is both child initiated and teacher facilitated. We focus on the process of learning in all its intricacies, not just the end result or the product. The learner must be trusted and supported to follow the creative processes without worry of what the finished product may be. At the Discovery School, we are dedicated to allowing children the freedom to explore the world at their leisure and direction, while setting age appropriate boundaries and limits to make sure children feel safe.

Curriculum

We create a learning environment at our school that fosters independence, divergent thinking, creativity, and a love for learning that lasts a lifetime. This handbook discusses each academic aspect along with examples so you can fully understand our program and why we consider it the best prescription for learning. We believe that learning happens when it is meaningful for each child. Learning must occur in a natural way so that it is seen as play not memorization, worksheets or meaningless drills. Our play based curriculum allows children the freedom to grow in their own unique way.

Environment

The environment is structured to ensure the success of every student. We look at our workspace as an additional teacher whose help is imperative. Our environment is exciting, sensory rich, and provokes children to take another look at materials in the room. The environment is organized so materials are readily available and in a logical spot. The room structure helps to create a sense of autonomy, gives children choices, and allows for less intervention from teachers/adults. This gives children the tools for success and the choice to explore what is interesting to them.

Materials

You will see open-ended materials in our classroom as well as real world objects. We want children's imagination to fuel their use of the materials. We don't want the manufacturer of the toys to be influencing and dictating the use of specific materials. This kind of environment fosters the joy of lifelong learning as well as helping children become problem solvers and possess divergent thinking skills.

Self-Regulation

Our schedule provides continuity for the children in our classroom. They know specifically what order things happen in each day. The day is predictable, and they can count on what will happen each day at school. This allows for a smooth transition throughout the entire day. Please understand that our program is child centered and that sometimes we must adjust for the wellbeing of all children. A responsibility guidance system (positive guidance/redirection) governs our limit setting in the classroom. Children have power, ownership, and control in our classroom, as do all members of our classroom community. Our classroom, as a whole, decides on the limits for our room and these limits are enforced at all times. Children know the expectations and are given choices within our structure. This allows children the freedom to explore while creating a safe environment for everyone. Feelings are always validated in our classroom. We create an environment where all children have autonomy, can communicate feelings and understand the consequences of their behavior. They learn to develop empathy for all members of our community and can solve their own problems without intervention

Art

We use open ended materials for children to develop their own unique artwork. Some examples of the open ended materials are recycled items and items found in nature. Children will be exposed to various art media such as markers, crayons, chalk, charcoal, pastels, colored and drawing pencils, acrylic and watercolor paints, different textures of paper to work with, and clay. Art is an integral part of our curriculum and children can choose to be involved in art projects as much as they desire. We want children to view art as a unique expression of who they are so you won't see models for children to duplicate, stencils, or coloring books that require children to see art in a specific way.

Science

Students will be exploring nature by taking daily hikes on our trails and through our spring fed creeks. They will be developing a sense of community and environmental awareness by recycling, composting, planting, and maintaining a garden. We have a microscope set up to take a closer look at insects and other creatures found at our school. We will make our own slides to look at, and explore, our surroundings in depth. We have a terrarium set up so we can observe objects from nature in their natural habitat. Students will be learning basic science concepts, understanding what it means to be part of a community, and developing a sense of responsibility and appreciation for our environment. Water play is naturally built into our environment. Our bathroom is designed for children's water play. They will be constantly measuring, adding color and soap to water, using cylinders, funnels, tubing, and other containers. They will be able to see the properties of the water change as they manipulate it.

Reading, Writing, and Language Skills

Our approach to reading is based on a whole language philosophy which includes various strategies to help a reader succeed. This includes using predictable text/rhyming text, pictorial clues, and phonics. Reading is a part of our daily schedule and students can bring home a book of their choice each night. Students will also have a listening center where they can listen to stories and follow along with the text of the book. We want children to be exposed to quality children's literature. We want children to begin to write in a meaningful way. It is important to allow children to write approximations of a word as they begin to spell. We work with children by helping them hear sounds in a word and by helping them to acquire the tools to find new words for themselves. For example, we help them to develop strategies for finding the spelling of a new word by helping them use a dictionary, asking a friend or teacher to help find the word, or by finding the word in a familiar story. They will also practice writing skills by creating grocery lists, project lists, steps involved in cooking, and in other natural ways that writing occurs. Students will begin writing their own stories by dictating to a teacher/volunteer and then they will begin writing on their own. It is important to understand that children will become readers and writers on their own and in their own time. We want to be there for encouragement but never to push them. Children will learn to read naturally by being exposed to literature. Children learn to talk by listening to others talk to them and it is the same for reading. We are not worried about your child being a reader or writer by some predetermined deadline that is meaningless. We will just be there to provide the opportunity when they are ready.

Math

We use open ended materials such as rocks, shells, leaves, pine cones, as well as beads, unifix cubes, and geoboards to count, show one to one correspondence, show measurement, length and width, show identity of shapes, etc. Students will begin to see symmetry and patterns. They will learn basic concepts of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and geometry. This learning will occur by counting and measuring when activities like cooking, water play and making grocery lists happen. We take advantage of natural times like these to teach math concepts while a child is fully engaged so that learning takes place naturally. Each child's own natural rhythm is respected so children are not forced into work that is meaningless to them.

Observations

Each week we will email a short video capturing a moment in your child's experience at school. These videos are designed to give families an idea of how their child is interacting with the environment, materials and other children.

Nap

Naptime is from 12:30 to 1:45 each day. Every child is given the choice to take a nap if they are feeling tired but not every child is required to nap. This decision is left to families based on the needs of their child. Please inform us if you would like your child to take a nap each day and provide them with a sheet and blanket.

Lunch and Snack

A nutritious snack is served in the morning and afternoon at Discovery School. We eat lunch around 11:15 a.m. Please respect our low sugar/no chocolate policy and pack a food that is nutritious. Water is provided with lunch and snack.

Drop Off Procedures

Please arrive at CDC no later than 8:30. We do this to avoid overcrowding on the second bus. If you arrive after 8:30 there is a chance the first bus will have left and second bus could be full.

The first bus leaves at 8:30 and we will fill it first come first serve. Unfortunately we are unable to take request on which bus your child prefers to ride. The second bus leaves at 8:45, we are unable to wait after 8:45 due to ratio issues that arise in the Starburst classroom.

Please say goodbye to your child inside the playground at CDC rather than walking them to the bus as this becomes difficult for the teachers to see that the children make it on bus safely.

Pick Up Procedures

Discovery School closes at 5pm. The first bus arrives at CDC between 5:00 and 5:15. Please let us know if you want your child on the first bus in the afternoon. The second bus arrives at CDC between 5:15 and 5:30. When picking up your child please tell a Discovery School teacher so we can properly sign them out to your care.

Parental Involvement

To make our program work, we must truly create a partnership with our parent body. We will need a commitment of time from you. The first item will be to attend an orientation session of what to expect from our school. We want our parent body to become active in the decision making process of our school. We want and value your input. We will like you to commit to coming to a specific number of workdays which will be held on a few Saturdays, and volunteer at the school as your time allows. As always, parents are welcome and encouraged to visit at anytime. We have an open door policy.

Schedule Changes

If you need to change your child's schedule, whether that be riding the bus or being picked up at Discovery or changing the person who normally picks up your child, it is our policy that you tell the teacher signing children in on the clipboard at drop off so that they have a written note. Please make sure to do this on the day of the change. If the change occurs during the day, call the Discovery School and we will make a written note of the change.

Tuition

Monthly tuition is \$1,115 for full time care. There is an annual registration fee of \$150. This fee offsets the annual cost of added curriculum, pool, music, yoga, bus expenses and our school library. Children moving up from the Starburst class are charged this fee in September.

Tuition is due on the first of each month. Payment can be made by credit card (Discover, MasterCard, Visa), debit card or check only, as we cannot accept cash payments. There is a six-day grace period; after the sixth day of the month there will be a \$25 late fee. If your tuition is more than 30 days late, your child will not be able to attend school. Tuition is not prorated for holidays. Parents can set up an automatic payment plan with Smart Care to use their credit card to pay tuition each month. You may also set up an auto payment using your debit card or ACH (bank) draft for a discount. Upon enrolling, you should receive an invitation to join the Smart Care App to set up payment preferences. Please note that we raise tuition rates every September. This allows us to give annual staff pay raises, offer benefits, and keep up with equipment and facility maintenance.

Deposit/Waiting List

DEPOSIT: \$300

This deposit will secure your child's place in line to get into the Discovery School. Please send the deposit and enrollment form together in order to reserve a place in line for your child. See the director for details if you have any questions. After you are enrolled and attending The Discovery School, half of this deposit will be refundable if you give thirty days written notice of withdrawal. The other half is a registration fee. (If you are a current student at CDC, your deposit will roll over to The Discovery School. You will still need to pay the \$150 registration fee.)

Physical Activity

At The Discovery School we are very physically active. We spend a lot of the day outside walking, running, jumping, climbing, dancing, etc. We go on regular hikes up and down rocky hills in the preserve when the weather permits and swim everyday in the Summer months. These activities are great for your child's gross motor development and self-confidence. It is important that your child comes to school each day physically well enough to be able to safely participate in our very active program. If you have any questions regarding the physical health and well-being of your child at The Discovery School please contact a director.

Medication

If your child needs to be given medication during the day, you must fill out our form for administering medication. The medication must be in its original container with your child's full name labeled clearly and the date brought to school. The medication must be given to a Discovery School teacher so we can keep it in a safe place away from children.

Health and Immunizations

Each child will be given a check upon arrival at school. This is for the child's protection as well as for other children. Children with contagious symptoms or visible illness will not be allowed to stay at school. Children must be able to take on an active day at school and be able to keep up with the pace of a normal school day. Any child that seems drained or not feeling well should not be at school. We do not have staffing available for sick child care. Other symptoms that will not be allowed in school are: fever above 100 degrees, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue or discolored mucus. If a child stays home or is sent home from school, they need to be symptom free for at least 24 hours before returning to school. Parents are encouraged to report any contagious diseases to the director for the safety of the rest of the children. Policies regarding exclusion and re-admittance are dictated by the regulations of the Health Department. A written documentation of immunizations for measles, mumps, rubella, polio, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, tuberculosis, and Hib must be presented at the time of enrollment. You must have a notarized statement if are not immunizing. A well child statement from your child's doctor must also be presented. The immunization schedule you must follow is attached to the back of this handbook. You must keep the documentation of your child's immunizations current with the director.

Absence Policy

If your child will be out longer than one day due to illness or vacation, please call us at 512-372-2460 or email us at discoveryobservations@gmail.com.

Road Closures/Inclement Weather

The Discovery School is located between 2 water crossings on Spicewood Springs road. Occasionally, we have to close the school when the water is over the road. When the school closes during the school year, we will relocate to Spilled Milk Social Club located at 3310 Red River Street. On these days you will be required to pick-up your child from CDC Duval at 2:30pm.

http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/fews/water_level.cfm for flow rates of Bull Creek. Go to the second big graph and Bull Creek is the first creek listed. Any flow rate of 200 cubic feet per second will usually close the road. Normal flow is under 60 CFS, and when it stops raining, the crest is usually an hour after that. Between the two large graphs is the Rainwater Chart shortcut, click on the word "chart" and scroll down to the Bull Creek section to see the 5 collection sites along Bull Creek broken down to 15 minute intervals. Any rain close to one inch per hour will usually make the flow rate go above 200 CFS (unless the creek starts out empty, since the ground saturation condition comes into play for how much of the rain gets absorbed vs running off).

Road closures can be found at www.atxfloods.com

Supplies Needed

- A backpack to carry labeled clothes, etc back and forth on the bus
- Personal water bottle with name on it
- Hiking shoes (possibly to leave at school)
- Lunch box with an ice pack (Wednesday is pizza day)
- One complete change of clothes to keep at school, extra underwear
- Swimsuit
- Sunscreen & Bug Spray: We use these communally. Please let us know if you have a special request for deet-free insect repellent.
- Sheet and blanket (if your child takes naps)
- Please leave all toys at home and be sure to label all belongings with a permanent marker
- Every Thursday is show and tell. Please only bring one item that fits in a backpack

Clothing Policy

SUMMER:

Please bring warmer weather clothes, along with a swimsuit, sandals or shoes. A backpack to carry labeled clothes, etc back and forth on the busses.

FALL/SPRING/WINTER:

Please dress your child in clothes appropriate for the weather. Please bring hiking shoes or sneakers, we hike daily during these months. Any child wearing crocs, sandals or flip flops will not be allowed to hike. These types of shoes make it very hard for a child to keep up with the group and often fall off of the foot when climbing steep hills.

Hours of Operation and Holidays

Discovery School is open Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 5:00pm.

Our program will close during the following holidays:

- Martin Luther King Day
- AISD schedule for the week of Spring Break
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day (or the closest weekday if it falls on a weekend)
- Labor Day
- The 2nd Monday in October (Staff Development Day)
- AISD schedule for the week of Thanksgiving
- AISD schedule for Winter Break (includes Christmas and New Year's Day)

Workdays: (4 per year)

Third Saturday in January, May, August, and November

Technology Policy

The Discovery School does not keep T.V.s or computers in the classrooms. From time to time, teachers may bring in an electronic device to enhance a specific concept the children have decided to explore. For example, we use overhead projectors to project transparencies of books and to use for drawing projects, we often use our night vision, motion sensor camera in the woods to take photos of wildlife, and we will occasionally use the copy machine to help the children print images related to a certain topic to enhance their learning experience. However, even as a means of educational enrichment these times will be rare. We fully believe that electronic media can get in the way of exploring, playing, and interacting with others; all of which encourage learning and healthy physical and social development. More so, whenever possible, we prefer to spend our time outdoors and in a natural environment. Communication between staff and families is extremely important. However, per state requirements and our school policy, teachers are not allowed to use cell phones while in the classroom.

Feedback Protocol

If you have feedback about a policy or procedure at The Discovery School, please feel free to email discoveryobservations@gmail.com to schedule a parent/director meeting. We take all concerns seriously and encourage constructive dialogue.

Parent Resources

Here are some suggested books that are great resources:

- Bev Bos: Don't Move the Muffin Tins, Together We're Better, Before the Basics
- Carla Hannaford, Ph. D: Smart Moves - Why Learning is Not All in Your Head
- Jane Healy, Ph. D: Endangered Minds - Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It
- Dr. Becky Bailey: There's Gotta Be a Better Way - Discipline That Works
- Alfie Kohn: Punished by Rewards
- Howard Gardner: Multiple Intelligences, Frames of the Mind
- Thomas Armstrong, Ph. D: 7 Kinds of Smart, Awakening Your Child's Natural Genius, In Their Own Way
- Victoria Jean Dimidjian: Play's Place in Public Education for Young Children
- Stephen Nachmanovitch: Free Play
- Lella Gandani, George Forman & Carolyn Edwards: 100 Languages of Children

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Families and teachers are encouraged to communicate regularly with each other and to ask for a parent-teacher conference at any point in time. A particularly good time is when there is a concern that has not been fully addressed. It is important for parents and teachers to connect without distractions. Problems should not be addressed in front of children. When the teachers are in the classroom or on the playground, they are responsible for many children. Teachers will not be able to carry on lengthy conversations during those times, but we want to know how parents feel, so we always welcome you to set up a conference.

Challenging Behaviors

Our schedule provides continuity for the children in our classroom. They know specifically what order things happen in each day. The day is predictable and they are able to count on what will happen each day at school. This allows for a smooth transition throughout the entire day. Please understand that our program is child centered and that sometimes we must make adjustments for the well being of all children. A responsibility guidance system (positive guidance/redirection) governs our limit setting in the classroom. Children have power, ownership, and control in our classroom, as do all members of our classroom community. Our classroom, as a whole, decides on the limits for our room and these limits are enforced at all times. Children know the expectations and are given choices within our structure. This allows children the freedom to explore while creating a safe environment for everyone. Feelings are always validated in our classroom. We create an environment where all children have autonomy, are able to communicate feelings and understand the consequences of their behavior. They learn to develop empathy for all members of our community and are able to solve their own problems without intervention.

Parent Notifications/Updated Paperwork

If we need to notify you about changes at Discovery School, including procedural changes, we will send out an email to everyone as soon as these changes are made. Please make sure we always have your current contact information (email addresses, phone numbers and emergency contacts). Each year we will ask that you fill out an updated form so that we have access to your current contact information and are aware of any other changes that might have occurred.

Termination Policy

Expulsion and suspension rates are alarmingly high in Texas preschools. The Discovery School does not suspend children and we have a continuing practice to prevent the expulsion of children from our program while maintaining the safety and well-being of everyone in our care. Our utmost concern is the health and safety of the children and staff in our program. We will always do all that we can to insure the success and ongoing care of each child in our care. However, there may be times when a child's needs may require more individualized care and supervision than our group setting can accommodate. Exclusionary measures are only used as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a determination of a serious threat that cannot otherwise be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications consistent with our policies and procedures. In the rare event that a child must leave our program, we will work to help to make the transition as seamless as possible and to assist the family in accessing services through Workforce Solutions to find alternative placement that is more appropriate for the well-being of the child. Please let a Director know if you have any questions.