



Solomon Schechter Day School Early Childhood Parent Guide



"Our task regarding creativity is to help children climb their own mountains as high as possible.

No one can do more."

Loris Malaguzzi, (Early Childhood Director)

Reggio Emilia, Italy

Philosophy

The Early Childhood Program at Solomon Schechter Day School celebrates the uniqueness of each child. Through a multi-age model, we respect individual differences in learning styles and growth patterns. We understand that children thrive socially, emotionally and intellectually when provided with a developmentally appropriate environment. Teachers are available to support and facilitate children's interests and activities. We create an environment that is nurturing and teaches responsibility, respect, values and independence. The children see themselves as an integral part of a Jewish community and learn that Judaism is a way of life.

Guided by The Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards

The Solomon Schechter Day School Early Childhood program uses the CT Early Learning and Development Standards in curriculum planning. This is a curriculum designed for preschool-age children and is endorsed by The National Association for the Education of Young Children. The curriculum identifies goals in eight areas of development: Cognition, Social and Emotional, Physical, Language and Literacy, Creative Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. At Schechter, we add Jewish Identity Development as the ninth domain. Through planned activities, classroom organization, materials, daily schedules and interaction with the children, we seek to accomplish the goals of the curriculum and provide your child with a successful start in school.

Inspired by The Reggio Emilia Approach

Our Early Childhood program is inspired by the Early Childhood philosophy of the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy. This approach focuses on fostering relationships among children, teachers, parents and community. An integral part of the approach is hands-and minds-on exploration. Children explore materials and media through an environment that inspires learning. Children also engage in long-term projects based on an "**emerging curriculum,**" of children's interests, which is a central feature. The values and philosophy of the Reggio Emilia Approach dovetail with Schechter's values and philosophy, enhancing the school's commitment to excellent Jewish and General Studies education.

Rooted in Jewish Tradition

At Schechter, Jewish learning, identity development and values are a part of everyday life. Torah study, Jewish culture, holiday celebrations, Israel, and Hebrew language are incorporated throughout our curriculum. There are opportunities for the children to experience math, science, music, art, sensory, cooking and literacy activities whether we are learning about Purim or insects. For some of our families, this is a first exposure to customs and traditions associated with being Jewish. Throughout the year there are opportunities for parent involvement and participation in family education programs. We view families as our partners and an integral part of our school community.

Our Staff

The Early Childhood teaching team holds degrees in Early Childhood Education and participates in ongoing professional development. In addition to our highly qualified early childhood staff we have an incredible support team which includes:

Head of School
Early Childhood Coordinator
Director of Teaching and Learning

Admissions and Student Life Coordinator
School Counselor
School Nurse
Visual Arts Educator
Early Childhood Music Educator
Physical Education Instructor

Connecting with Families/Kaymbu

Each class will share photos, videos, daily classroom happenings and updates through the Kaymbu App. Your child's teacher will provide more information in the first weeks of school.

The Environment

Each Early Childhood classroom typically includes the following interest areas:

- Blocks (large and small building activities)
- Dramatic Play
- Art
- Sensory/Science
- Cooking
- Library/Reading Center
- Writing Center
- Manipulatives/Math
- Outdoor Classroom space

The entire school is available for our use. In addition to housing the individual early childhood classrooms we have access to:

- *Beit Tefilah*
- Auditorium
- Music Room
- Gymnasium

Class Size and Ratio

The Two-Year-Old class maintains a 1 to 4 teacher-child ratio.

The Three- and Four-Year-Old classrooms maintain a 1 to 10 teacher-child ratio.

Morning Drop Off

Early Childhood begins at 8:30 a.m.

Teachers are available at 8:00 a.m. for early classroom drop off.

A timely morning arrival helps to ensure a smooth transition into the classroom each day. Our morning routine begins with an open-ended exploration time. The children may choose from a number of early learning provocations in all areas of development. Providing the time and opportunity to explore enables young children to develop their interests and passions in an unrushed environment. This is central to our Reggio play-based curriculum.

If you do arrive late, please go directly to the main office to sign in before bringing your child to class. Also, please exit through the office to sign out.

Delays due to weather:

Regular Program / Early Morning program Arrival Times

The arrival time for a one hour delay is 9:20 and 10:20 for a 2 hour delay.

The drop off time for the early morning program is 8:00 a.m. for a one hour delay and 9:00 a.m. for a 2 hour delay.

Early Dismissal Days:

Schechter closes for early dismissal due to professional development, holidays, or any weather related closings.

Parental Concerns

Partnering with parents is essential to building relationships and community. It is best to schedule a meeting with the classroom teacher to discuss issues that need special attention.

Drop-off and pick-up times are very busy; please refrain from addressing concerns at these times unless it is something that needs immediate attention. Teachers are available to meet either before or after school by phone or Zoom. Parents should leave messages directly in the teacher's voice mailbox or by email (teacher's first initial, last name followed by @ssds-hartford.org) to arrange a convenient time to meet. Teachers will do their best to respond to emails within 24 hours. We thank you for not contacting teachers at their homes.

Absences/Add Ons

If your child will be absent from school, please notify the office (860-561-0700). There are no make-up days in our Early Childhood program.

If you wish to add a day to your child's schedule, please notify KShakun@ssds-hartford.org at least 24 hours in advance. We will work to accommodate requests as long as teacher-student ratios are maintained.

Illness

Please keep your child home for at least 24 hours after illness including vomiting, diarrhea, or fever. Children who become ill during school hours must be picked up within one hour of notification. Please contact our school nurse with any questions.

Appropriate Clothing

Please dress your child appropriately for school; we encourage the children to participate in many messy, gooey and sticky activities, so comfortable play clothing is best. For safety, please send your child to school in closed-toe shoes only (no crocs please).

Sneakers are to be worn on Physical Education days. **Please provide a full set of extra clothing including shoes for your child's cubby.**

Children are encouraged to wear a kippah on Shabbat and when we visit the Beit Tefillah.

Snack and Lunch

The Early Childhood program provides a healthy morning snack. Please let us know if your child has any allergies, food or otherwise, of which we should be aware. Children registered for our full day program are asked to bring an afternoon snack. **Please provide your child with a labeled water bottle daily.**

The Early Childhood classes eat lunch at noon. We are a kosher/dairy school. No meat from home please.

Important Note on nuts and allergens:

Our kitchen is nut free, as are our school lunches. Due to the severity of allergic reactions to tree nuts and peanuts, and to the fact that some pre-school children may have an undiagnosed nut allergy and be too young to express that they are experiencing signs of an impending allergic reaction, **we are adopting a nut-sensitive policy for all of our Early Childhood classrooms as of the 2021-2022 school year.**

- No food items that contain "peanuts" or "tree nuts" as a listed ingredient
- No food items that state that they "may contain traces of peanuts and/or tree nuts," should be sent to school.

You may send items whose ingredient label states "processed in a facility that also processes peanuts and/or tree nuts" or "manufactured in a facility that also processes peanuts and/or tree nuts".

Please send your child's lunch in a labeled "lunch box." All food containers should be labeled as well. Please provide a beverage, napkins, and utensils. We suggest investing in a hot/cold thermos as we are unable to heat or refrigerate lunches. Your child's teachers will assist with unpacking and packing up lunch boxes.

School lunches will be available for children in Early Childhood daily. More information will be sent home when the program begins.

The Schechter EC program advocates for nutritious foods and healthy choices. Teachers encourage the children to eat their "main course" first and eat other food items after. We respectfully ask that you refrain from sending candy in your child's lunch.

Food-Free Birthday Celebrations at School

Your child's birthday is a joyous occasion and we look forward to celebrating with you and your child in our classroom.

Creating a safe school environment for your child is of the utmost importance. To ensure the well being of our students, we are requesting that birthday celebrations be "food free." Please do not distribute any food items to the children in the class.

There are many fun and celebratory ways to acknowledge your child's birthday. You may donate a book to the class in honor of your child. If you have a special talent, please come in to share it with us. If you would like specific suggestions, your child's teacher would be happy to help you.

Please arrange a date and time with the classroom teacher and join us for stories, special songs, birthday wishes.

Birthday Celebrations Outside of School

When hosting a birthday celebration outside of school, please be sensitive to others. Party invitations should not be distributed at school unless the entire class is invited. Birthday parties should not be held on Shabbat or Jewish festivals.

Unified Arts

The Early Childhood students participate in P.E. and Music once a week in addition to their regular classroom activities.

Field Trips

The Early Childhood classes take several field trips throughout the school year. Your child's teacher will notify you when a trip has been scheduled. Class parents chaperone and provide transportation.

Toys and Items from Home

We ask that your child does not bring toys from home. We encourage the children to use the toys and materials provided for them at school. Items of special significance or books that relate to the current topic exploration and learning are always welcome. A "Lovie" for rest time is encouraged if your child is staying the full day.

Allergies, Medications and Sunscreen

If your child has allergies and/or requires medication during school hours, please consult with the school nurse.

Apply sunscreen prior to arriving at school, and please do not leave sunscreen in your child's cubby. If your child requires an additional application during the school day, please contact the school nurse to fill out the appropriate forms.

Diapering and Toilet Training

If your child is not toilet trained, please provide an ample supply of labeled disposable diapers and wipes. Diapers will be changed at scheduled times of the day and as needed. Your child's teachers will reach out to you when your supply is running low. Please replenish diapers and wipes in a timely manner; we do not supply these items at school.

Toilet Training

In the toilet training process we respect each individual child's growth and development. We do not believe in hurrying children in this process until they show clear signs of being ready for this important stage of growth.

If a child begins to show interest in toileting at home, the classroom teachers will partner with families in this very important milestone in your child's development.

Signs of readiness may include:

- Having dry periods of at least 2 hours or waking up dry after a nap
- Disliking the feeling of a wet diaper
- Showing interest in other's bathroom habits
- Verbalizing that they are going in their diaper
- Showing interest and willingness to sit on the toilet or potty chair

Please reach out to your child's teachers to set forth a plan to make sure your child's toilet-training experience is a positive one.

It is best to begin this process when the child is home for several days before he/she is expected to stay dry in a less familiar setting. Please allow at least 3 days of staying dry before sending your child into school wearing pull ups or training underwear. Also, once the process has begun please bring a large supply of pull-ups (ones with flaps) or training underwear. We ask for pull-ups or the thicker training underwear as it is more absorbent and thus more sanitary for the classroom setting.

Extra Clothing and Soiled Clothing

Please provide a labeled change of clothing for your child to be stored in his/her cubby. Please include an extra pair of shoes and socks. We suggest periodically checking your child's extra clothing supply.

If a child has soiled his/her clothing the teachers will send it home in a plastic bag for laundering. We do not have laundering facilities at school.

Conferences

The Early Childhood team holds formal parent-teacher conferences twice a year. Parents will be notified of the date and will need to sign up online to schedule a conference. Although we hold formal conferences twice a year, we urge parents to communicate with teachers on a regular basis.

Early Childhood Social/Emotional Development and Challenging Behavior

Classroom Community:

EC teachers work to provide students with the “tools” to be successful in a classroom community. When children are struggling with a conflict, teachers provide support and help them to verbalize what they need/want and model appropriate behavior. If the conflict is physical (pushing or pulling) a teacher will intervene, address safety concerns and work on “unpacking” the problem along with the children to develop solutions. Teachers reflect on the importance of acknowledging feelings both emotional and physical and reinforce that “our” school is a peaceful community. This sets the tone for an environment that reflects the core values of Schechter.

Discussion

When a child is struggling with behavioral challenges, we will first discuss the situation with the child. We discuss feelings that the child may have that caused the behavior. If a friend was hurt, either emotionally or physically, we also discuss how that person is feeling and “check to see” if that child is ok.”

Mindfulness, Calming Jar, Redirection and "Taking a Break"

Mindfulness increases a child's ability to regulate emotions, feel compassion and empathy. The practice of meditation and mindfulness in early childhood settings builds key skills like focus and self-control. If a child is struggling with a conflict a teacher may suggest breathing techniques to calm down. A child may be asked to “take a break” for a while to calm down before returning to an activity. A “calming jar” is available in all of the EC classrooms, complete with a variety of stimulating sensory items for the child to choose from. Redirection often involves either having a child explore another activity in a different part of the room or *one-on-one time* with the teacher. A teacher may read with a child, play a game or work a puzzle with a child who needs to reset. Many times a teacher will take an unhappy, sad, or angry child for a walk or run outside or in the gym. This provides the child with a break from the routine, a distraction and the opportunity to refocus.

Parent Communication

If there is an incident in which a child has hurt another child, both sets of parents will be notified. Parents will also be notified if a child has repeated behavioral issues occurring on the same day. If inappropriate behavior continues on a consistent basis, parents will be called for a meeting to discuss an individual behavior plan for the child.

Afternoon Pick-Up/After-School Arrangements

Early Childhood dismissal is at 12:45 and 3:30 pm. We encourage you to arrive for pick-up prior to the dismissal time. At 12:45 please park your car in front of the school and your child’s teacher will walk your child out of the front doors to meet you. Children remaining at school after 12:45 p.m. dismissal, with or without written notice, will join the full day class; in that case, you will be charged for an extended day.

New families, or authorized pick- up persons that we do not recognize will be asked to show ID before entering the double doors and also in the classroom

If there is any change to your child’s daily pick-up schedule, please notify the main office by 11:30 a.m. that day.

Please notify us via the authorized pick-up form who is given permission to pick up your child from school. If a person whom the classroom teacher has never met will be picking up your child, that individual must present the classroom teacher with photo identification. Regular carpools only need written information once, to keep on file. If written permission is not received, the classroom teacher will attempt to contact the parent. In the event that the parent cannot be reached, your child will remain at school.

Early Childhood Information Checklist

Please sign and return this page to your child's mailbox at school.

I have completed the Child Questionnaire _____

I have read the SSDS Early Childhood Information Handbook _____

I have turned in the authorized pick up form to the teachers _____

Parent Signature _____

Date _____

