Great Futures Preschool Curriculum

Yes, we cover all content areas of academic learning such as:

Math, Music, Literacy, Science and Art

But more importantly, we also focus on the kinds of learning and personal growth that cannot be measured and is completely essential for providing the necessary foundation for being able to learn in the first place.

We strive on facilitating Self-confidence, Curiosity, Creativity, a feeling of Belonging in their community, having a Voice in their learning and its direction and overall: Empowerment.

In other words, everything is part of the curriculum. The following are a few points of each area of our curriculum.

GENERAL

OUR TOYS

❖ Our toys are carefully chosen to ensure we have a variety of texture, weight, and material, as well as quality of manipulation and sensory integration benefits.

❖ Since optimum brain development is our desire we believe it's the child's job to play, not the toys.

❖ Manipulation and experimentation is the key to creative thinking!

❖ Hands-on learning. We try to make all learning relevant with real objects that children can touch. “If it’s in the hand it’s in the head” (Bev Bos).
THE TEACHER’S ROLE

- We do not expect children to simply adhere to our adult way of thinking, rather, they learn from their choices and gain experiences to use the next time. Our main job is to help provide scaffolding that will boost their thoughts to the next level.
- We switch certain responsibilities back to the child. There are certain aspects that are the right of a human to do on their own when they’re able. Examples are: Putting on their shoes, pouring their own water, getting out materials, cleaning up. Not only are preschool children capable of these tasks, but when they succeed at being responsible for themselves they gain self-esteem and self-control.
- Caring and loving attitudes. This is prevalent in our preschool and a huge part of our curriculum for modeling positive behavior.

ENVIRONMENT

- Sensory-rich environment! Toys, activities, materials are selected with intention to feed the 7 senses a healthy daily diet.
- We go outside every day except on really rainy/sleeting days. We love Tahoe!
- Variety of manipulatives and art supplies, always available to the children.
- Animals and plants to care for in and out of our classroom. These provide teachings in responsibility and science as well as benefitting our children’s emotional needs.
- Our location is ideal for field trips, hiking opportunities, stream environment observations and regular trips to the local library and beach.
DISCIPLINE

- Following the example of the Kings Beach Elementary School we adopted these core principles for the foundation of our rules: Responsibility, Respect and Safety.
- When one of our principles are being broken we:
  1. Stop the Action
  2. State the problem
  3. Validate Feelings
  4. Offer solutions

- When a child...Cannot be talked with because he/she is out of control; Have already been talked to too many times for the same issue, or; Too emotionally upset we make use of a self-regulation model (using the “Comfy Chair”) allowing the child time to recover themselves.

SOCIAL

- Everyday provides numerous turn-taking opportunities in large groups, small groups and one on one.
- Our set-up encourages interactions and cooperative-play helping children learn how to work in groups, with another child and by themselves.
- Children are encouraged to be involved in issues at hand. If someone is being disrespectful or if someone is being treated badly we often have group discussions to find solutions. Many times we find the children have suggestions we adults didn’t think of!
- We encourage children to take charge of their social problems, yet we are readily available when they need guidance.
- Weekly lessons on Empathy, Problem-Solving and Anger Management are given utilizing the Second Step program.
EMOTIONAL

- Hugging allowed! When a child needs love we extend it.
- Voicing emotions is very hard for preschoolers to do. We try to be their voice and reinforce the appropriate language for them to be able to use when they are ready to express their emotions on their own.
- Calming techniques are used to help children regain their composure, whether they're angry, frustrated, sad, hurt, or even over-excited.
- Validating their feelings, showing them we understand how they feel, makes all the world of difference in how they recover from strong feelings.
- Every day we have activities that boost the children's empowerment, manners, belonging and responsibility to self.
- Our multi-age classrooms enable the older child to feel confident in their abilities (as they see how far they've come, and in helping the younger children), and the younger children look up to the older children learning from them.
- Our atmosphere creates a loving environment where children feel safe, have a sense of belonging and feel loved.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- Every day children are engaged in activities that develop their small and large motor skills.
- Small motor skills, mainly using hands and fingers, are strengthened through activities like ripping paper, drawing, using scissors, connecting nuts and bolts, manipulating clay, using tools, etc.
- Large motor skills, involving arms, legs, torso and whole body, are strengthened through activities like climbing, hammering, carrying numerous objects, bike riding, jumping, throwing, etc.
- We love to do yoga! And dancing!
- We incorporate numerous activities to enhance children's sensory integration, as well as provide materials, toys and equipment that encourage sensory integration.

**LANGUAGE SKILLS**

- **DIALOGUE.** Studies show that those who do the most conversational talking learn the most. This is because it’s a strong medium to check for understanding. (Theresa Roberts, 2010) We converse freely during every single moment of school: Reading time, activity time, outside play, inside play, snack, circle time, etc. (Well, maybe not during nap time😊).
- We encourage questions and repeat back correct syntax/pronunciation, etc.
- Dramatic play (pretend play) further enhances language skills.
- Children love learning new words and we love teaching them! Children are introduced to words they may not normally hear or use at home.
- **Foreign Languages:** Spanish vocabulary is used throughout the week along with Spanish book and songs.

**LITERACY**

- We are a “print-rich” environment. Kids learn written word (print) concepts first through daily visuals and availability such as:
  - Their name on their toothbrush and cubbies.
  - Name cards with their name.
  - Words written under pictures.
  - Helper of the Day chart able to be “read” via pictures and words.
Everything labeled in the classroom with both pictures and printed word.
Books displayed and rotated to be new and enticing.
Writing tools always available.
Reading to the children every day.

- Pre-Literacy skills are built by:
  - Small hand-eye coordination and other physical movements.
  - Rhyming and other word-changing games.
  - Same/Different recognition and other differentiating games.

- Learning letters are done in a developmentally appropriate and fun manner.

- Since we understand brain development, we provide experiences and encouragement according to each individual’s developmental progression in this area. When a child’s brain has “turned on” the ready-to-read switch we begin implementing more learning in that area.

- Students are introduced to more advanced literacy concepts and practices such as beginning sounds, letter recognition and writing using the Handwriting Without Tears program as well as numerous fun games and activities.

**MATH**

- Mathematical concepts are embedded in almost everything that we do.
- We go beyond just counting! From measuring to shape definition; engineering concepts to sequencing patterns.
- Following the foundations set by the California Department of Education for preschool learning, we engage children in fun activities that enhance learning in these areas:
  - Number Sense- Important aspects of counting, number relationships and operations
- **Algebra and Functions**- Sorting and classifying objects; Recognizing, extending and creating patterns.
- **Measurement**- Comparing and ordering objects.
- **Geometry**- Properties of objects (shape, size, position) and the relation of objects in space.
- **Mathematical Reasoning**- Using mathematical thinking to solve problems in play and everyday activities.

**ART (Creative Representation)**

- Process oriented rather than product oriented!
- Process oriented means:
  - Exploring art materials to their fullest.
  - See what an art medium can do and to what extent.
  - Experimenting, Trial-and-Error, letting the mind and body go free to experience all the possibilities.
- We foster creativity by involving homemade: toys/projects/activities/playdough/goop...the list goes on.
- Children learn lost arts such as bread making, butter making, weaving, sewing and woodworking.
- Dramatic play, acting out stories, pretending, expressing selves via dance: not only do these allow for creative thinking, but they also foster emotional and social skills.

**MUSIC**

- Singing is one of the best ways to teach. Everyone knows it's a great way to remember things, because it involves both sides of the brain instead of just one side and its fun! So, of course, we sing a lot. Not just traditional or modern, but made up as well.
Every day we play music during open play. Sometimes it’s classical, sometimes kid’s songs, sometimes good ol’ rock n’ roll.

We have real instruments for the children to use every day. Sometimes we bring out a keyboard, violin and a guitar for them to listen to, explore how they make sound and to try playing.

Rhythm is taught via dancing, chanting, singing and special games.

**SCIENCE**

Yet another area that is embedded in all we do!

Biology, Chemistry, Botany, Meteorology, Physics, etc. When you think about it there is a science to everything and we try to invite scientific thinking in all we do. Most of our formal teachings are in the areas of Natural Sciences and Applied Sciences.

We use real scientific terms. We love when they learn to say “metamorphosis” and “precipitation” and they love saying them!

Experimentation, trial-and-error and curiosity are all encouraged and modeled.

**ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS**

Reducing, Reusing and Recycling are regular habits with us!

Gardening (in spring/summer). Children love eating foods they’ve grown themselves.

Close observation of neighboring habitats enable the children to appreciate our Tahoe wildlife.

Picking up litter on our hikes is another habit of ours. Sometimes we even make art pieces out of it!
MULTI-CULTURAL AWARENESS

- Some of our cultural introductions are through the materials the children use during play time. Materials such as pretend food, instruments, dress up clothes and books.
- We delve into celebrations of different countries such as Chinese New Year, Pongal (India), Day of the Dead (Latin America) and others.
- Using books as a spring board we explore how people from other cultures live, making the experiences concrete by creating artwork, making food or singing songs.
- Though we don’t celebrate any particular religious holidays, we acknowledge their relativity to human culture. Books, food, songs and art are used to teach about cultural and religious celebrations.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Daily tooth brushing encourages dental hygiene.
- Healthy snacks and meals are prepared fresh and served every day.
- We incorporate open conversations about health and safety with specific lessons on fire safety, hygiene and what to do in certain situations like being lost.
- Food pyramid lessons, emphasizing healthy food choices.
- Special guests such as dentist, Project Mana and police officer.
- Children are safer when they know their own physical limits. We allow children to build the necessary skill sets to know their limits.
- We schedule enough adults for appropriate supervision. Our licensed adult-child ratio is 3:24.
- All teachers are required to go through Fingerprint Clearance and be certified in First Aid and CPR, as well as trained in best practices in Health and Safety.
FIELD TRIPS

- We frequent our local library!
- Classroom extending to the out-of-doors is common during the fall, spring and summer.
- Forest exploration fosters respect for nature. The more they can touch it, manipulate it, experience it in all capacities (yes, even breaking off leaves from a bush) creates an understanding of how nature works as well as a deep connection and thereby respect forms (Richard Louv, Last Child in the Woods).
- We get to know our community and how it works through visiting numerous local businesses and establishments.
- Most our field trips are taken via public bus, walking or both. When our field trip is far away we will take the club vans using the children’s carseats.