



## Curriculum Philosophy

**Begin With Us** uses **Creative Curriculum** as well as the **Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood** as our framework for curriculum and assessment design.

We use **Creative Curriculum** because of its approach to learning. It is based on the philosophy that children learn best through hands-on activities. Teachers make intentional efforts to guide the children's thinking and support their learning as they interact with them throughout the day. They observe what the children are doing and then provide appropriate experiences to help them progress. Knowing how children develop and learn is the basis for planning our program, as well as for selecting materials and guiding children's learning. **Creative Curriculum** is developmentally appropriate. The teachers observe the children to determine each one's interests as well as each one's unique ability. The children are then given opportunities to explore and enhance their own interest in an area.

**The Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood** will identify what children should know or be able to do when they enter Kindergarten. The children are presented with learning opportunities that have a significant impact on their success. Our teachers strive to integrate each child's skill levels with the early learning standards, so that progress can be made socially, emotionally and cognitively. The Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards are aligned to the Common Core Standards.

## **Language and Literacy**

Language and literacy development encompasses listening, speaking, writing, and reading. (PA Learning Standards for Early Childhood 1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.6; 1.7; 1.8). The development of listening and understanding skills, receptive language, will help the child to listen to directions and then follow those directions. S/he will be able to respond to questions and understand that communication can occur in different ways.

Speaking skills, known as expressive language, relate to the child's ability to use speech and to communicate meaning. Not only is it important to speak clearly, but children need to be able to initiate conversations and respond appropriately to others. The child is able to understand information and meaning from stories and texts when they can connect new information to prior experiences and knowledge. We can see this happening when children make predictions, use illustration clues, retell a story in sequence, or draw connections between story events and personal experiences.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words and to understand that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds. This ability is key to success in emergent literacy skills including reading and writing. The critical phonemic awareness skills to be taught are as follows: the ability to hear and pronounce the beginning sound in a word, the ability to identify/name letters, and segmentation which is the ability to break apart spoken words into individual sounds. Children need to be able to distinguish one speech sound from another before learning the symbol (letter) that represents that sound. The use of songs, nursery rhymes and poems all help to develop the ability to recognize rhyming words as well as alliteration, words that begin with the same sound.

The children will develop an increased understanding of letter knowledge by associating the names of letters with their shapes and sounds as well as letter identification. **Handwriting Without Tears** is a fun and engaging instructional method that draws from years of innovation and research to provide developmentally appropriate, multisensory strategies for early writing. This method offers explicit instruction so each child becomes more comfortable with the skill of handwriting and gets a jump start on successful communication. Unique letter order, a unique physical approach, and materials that address all learning styles will be used while implementing **Handwriting Without Tears**.

We use different forms of writing such as drawing, using letter-like forms, inventive and conventional spelling. To accomplish this goal, our teachers use **Kid Writing**, which is an early learning strategy to support beginning writers. Children are encouraged to draw a story on paper. The teacher will ask the child to tell her what is happening in the story. At this point, it is important for the child to view her/himself as a story writer. The teacher will talk with the child to get more information about the story. This provides the opportunity for much needed language development. The child's readiness will determine the next step. The child may be able to count the number of words in the sentence, dictate a story, or may be ready to write what s/he thinks is heard as sounds are emphasized or stretched in words. The children's stories become part of a journal that is shared with parents. They are also used to monitor and measure their success.

## **Phonemic Awareness**

A phoneme is the smallest unit of speech that corresponds to a letter(s) of an alphabetic writing system. It is the awareness of phonemes that allows children to understand how the alphabet works. Research clearly shows that phonemic awareness can be

developed through instruction and, in doing so, significantly accelerates children's subsequent reading and writing achievement. Children at **Begin With Us** will be provided with concrete activities in order to stimulate the development of phonemic awareness. When teaching phonemic awareness, the structure of our program will introduce, practice, extend, and revisit the various phonemic tasks. New phonemic challenges will be presented in a gradual, step by step progression.

The overall goals are:

- To lead the children to attend to the phonological aspects of speech and ultimately, to help them to hear and feel the phonemes in words.
- To develop children's linguistic awareness and, in particular, their phonemic awareness in a way that cognitively prepares them for learning to read and write.
- Each part of our program is designed to develop a particular dimension of linguistic awareness and each is designed to lay the groundwork for the next.

The major objectives are as follows:

- **Listening:** To sharpen children's ability to attend selectively to sounds. (PA Learning Standard for Early Childhood 1.6)
- **Rhyming:** To practice recognizing and producing words that rhyme. (PALSEC 1.1; 1.3)
- **Alliteration:** To practice repeating and producing alliterative phrases. (PALSEC 1.1)
- **Sentence Segmentation:** To practice segmenting sentences into words. (PALSEC 1.1; 1.2)
- **Words and Sentences:** To develop children's awareness that language is made up of strings of words. (PALSEC 1.1)
- **Syllables:** To practice blending and segmenting syllables in words. (PALSEC 1.1)
- **Onset and Rime:** To practice identifying the initial consonant or consonants (onset) and the vowel and any consonants that follow it (rime). (PALSEC 1.1; 1.3)
- **Initial and Final Sounds:** To show the children that words contain phonemes and to introduce them to how phonemes sound and feel when spoken in isolation. (PALSEC 1.1)
- **Phonemes:** To practice blending, segmenting, manipulating and deleting the individual phonemes (sounds) in words. (PALSEC 1.1)
- **Introduce Letters and Spellings:** To introduce the relationship of letters to speech sounds. (PALSEC 1.1)

## Physical Health

Young children must be given opportunities to experience active indoor and outdoor play during which they can use their bodies to explore the environment while they acquire muscle control, balance, and coordination. Children can be seen marching, hopping, running, jumping, and dancing. As songs are sung or poems recited, children move to the rhythm or perform motions. (PA Learning Standard for Early Childhood 10.4)

Fine motor practice helps children develop eye – hand coordination, strength and control, and skilled use of writing implements. To develop strength in fine muscles, children can be seen using clay or play dough, tweezers, beads, puzzles, and scissors. The use of self-help skills such as buttoning, zipping, and snapping are also used. (PA Learning Standard for Early Childhood 10.5.)

Health and safety activities are integrated throughout the day. **Color Me Healthy** is a program that was developed to reach children ages four and five by using fun and interactive learning opportunities to promote physical activities and healthy eating. It will stimulate all of the senses of young children: touch, smell, sight, sound, and, of course, taste. Through the use of color, music, and exploration of the senses, **Color Me Healthy** teaches children that healthy food and physical activity are fun. (PA Learning Standards for Early Childhood 10.1 – 10.3)

Classrooms use **I am Moving, I am Learning** throughout the day to promote movement and a healthy lifestyle. **I am Moving, I am Learning** is a proactive approach for addressing childhood obesity in preschool children. IMIL seeks to increase daily moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA), improve the quality of movement activities intentionally planned and facilitated by adults, and promote healthy food choices every day. (PA Learning Standards for Early Childhood 10.1-3.2, 10.1-3.4 – 10.5.1)

The **SPARK** curriculum is used in classrooms to encourage children to be highly active, incorporate school readiness skills, and develop more confident and competent movers. Children participate in enjoyable, developmentally appropriate activities, many of which integrate with other subjects, and wellness concepts such as trying new foods and being active at home with a family member.

## Logical Mathematics

Our teachers facilitate mathematical learning by encouraging children to solve problems; compare objects; and think critically. We use **Stepping Stones** and **Everyday Math** as part of our curriculum in order to provide students with unique learning experiences which are designed to engage all of their senses. Preschool teachers will use **Stepping Stones**, an innovative program that offers developmentally appropriate play-based activities. This comprehensive curriculum actively engages children in learning mathematics so they can construct concepts and develop skills by interacting with real-world situations, classroom materials, and other children in whole group and small group settings. It has been carefully designed to promote fluency of skills and a balanced understanding of

mathematical concepts. Pre – K teachers will use **Everyday Math**, a comprehensive curriculum that features real-life problem solving, balanced instruction, basic skills practice, emphasis on communication, and appropriate use of technology. The content strands for **Everyday Math include** numbers and numeration, operations and computation, data and chance, measurement, geometry, and patterns. Both Stepping Stones and Everyday Math align with the PA Learning Standards for Early Education (PALSEC).

- Children count in meaningful context and use numbers and coins as part of their play. They use language to compare numbers of objects with terms such as more, less or equal. (PALSEC 2.1)
- Children learn to recognize, describe, and extend patterns. They sort, categorize, and classify. (PALSEC 2.8)
- Children will begin to recognize, name, draw, and compare two and three-dimensional shapes. They will correctly use positional words in play as well as a tool for learning to following directions. (PALSEC 2.9)
- Standard and non – standard measuring items will be used to explore the environment. Clocks and thermometers will be incorporated in lessons and play. (PALSEC 2.3)
- Children will be encouraged to gather information about themselves and their surroundings. Graphs will be used to organize and display data. (PALSEC 2.6)
- Children will be observed estimating, solving problems, asking questions, and making predictions all as part of engaging with one another in the classroom environment. (PALSEC 2.5)

## Science

Children are curious! They are eager to explore and discover information about the world around them. Science concepts are presented through **Creative Curriculum**. Our competent teachers will guide the children through the process of scientific inquiry; the study of life, physical, and Earth science topics; and the use of tools and technology for tasks as outlined in the PA Learning Standards for Early Childhood (PALSEC).

- Children use their senses to observe, explore, and gather information. (PALSEC 3.2)
- Tools are used (magnifying glasses, measuring devices, magnets, scales, etc) to explore materials. (PALSEC 3.2)
- Children make predictions, as well as compare, contrast, and classify data. (PALSEC3.2)
- Children will acquire knowledge about living and nonliving things. (PALSEC 3.1)
- Children will explore the physical properties of objects. (PALSEC 3.2)
- Children will investigate such things as changes in the environment, including weather and seasonal changes. (PALSEC 3.3)
- Children will begin to acquire knowledge about earth and space. (PALSEC 3.3)

## Social Studies

The children’s personal experiences and their initial understanding of themselves in relation to their families and homes is the foundation to social studies.

- Children will develop an understanding of themselves within a community. (PALSEC 5.1; 5.2; 6.1)
- Children will develop an understanding of how people and the environment affect one another. (PALSEC 7.4)
- Children will explore the roles of community workers, use of money, and production of goods and services. (PALSEC 6.1)

## Creative Arts

Creative art gives the opportunity to children to develop their imagination and creativity. When children view the work of others, they learn to appreciate and respect differences in culture and viewpoint.

- Children will have the opportunity to use a variety of visual art forms for creative expression and representation. (PALSEC 9.1c)
- Children will be able to express themselves through movement and music. (PALSEC 9.1a)
- Children will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of dramatic play experiences. (PALSEC 9.1b)
- Children will begin to recognize and name a variety of art forms. (PALSEC 9.3)

## Supplemental Curriculum

### Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies Curriculum (PATHS)

The **PATHS** program is grounded in the science of children’s brain development and has determined that children experience and react to strong emotions before developing the cognitive abilities to verbalize them. The PATHS program’s practical and effective

strategies teach children how to label their feelings and apply self-control strategies, leading to significant improvements in coping skills, classroom behavior, and verbal fluency.

The **PATHS** program is a violence-prevention curriculum that promotes social and emotional development, fosters literacy, encourages character education, and bullying prevention. It uses four main key characters (starring “Twiggles the Turtle”) and utilizes them in the form of puppets and stories, as well as in weekly lesson plans. The program also comes complete with take home activities to share with each child’s family.

### **Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving “I Can Problem Solve” (ICPS)**

**ICPS** teaches children to evaluate and deal with problems. It teaches children *how to* think not *what to* think by giving them ways to talk about their view of problems and to think the problems through.

The lessons begin with a pre-problem-solving section where the children are taught the vocabulary necessary for the program. Then it proceeds into the problem-solving section.

Examples of how the vocabulary is taught and used in the *Pre-Problem-Solving Skills* section are as follows:

- **IS/NOT=** This IS a good idea; That IS NOT a good idea.
- **SAME/DIFFERENT=** Kicking and hitting are the SAME because they both hurt someone. “Can you think of something DIFFERENT?”

The vocabulary used in ICPS helps children identify their own feelings as well as the feelings of other people. ICPS teaches children that there is more than one way to find out how someone else feels. It also teaches them that different people feel different ways about the same things.

ICPS also helps children realize not to assume everyone likes the same thing. When children wrongfully believe that everyone likes the same things they do, it sets them up for unsuccessful solutions. ICPS encourages them to try different ways of doing things.

The *Problem-Solving Skills* that ICPS focuses on are:

- **Alternative Solutions:** To help children recognize what a problem is and learn ways to generate many possible solutions.
- **Consequences:** To help children learn to think sequentially as a prerequisite to understanding cause-and-effect relationships and to encourage actual consequential thinking.
- **Solution-Consequence Pairs:** To give children practice in linking a solution with a possible consequence in a one-to-one fashion.

The **ICPS** program uses what is referred to as “dialoguing” to help children think through their problems and conflicts. Five basic principles underlie the dialoguing process:

- Both child and teacher must identify the problem.
- Understand and deal with the *real* problem. (For example, a child feels he shared his toy long enough and he grabs it back, the problem is not the grabbing, it is that he wants his toy back. Grabbing served as a solution to his problem.)
- Once the real problem has been identified, the teacher must not alter it to fit his or her own needs.
- The child, not the teacher, must solve the problem.
- The focus is on how the child thinks, not on what he thinks (in other words, the specific conclusions he comes to).

The program consists of 59 different lessons which address problems like nagging, demanding, crying, hitting, and not listening. The program’s results have been tested and those results show an overall decrease in impulsivity. The philosophy behind the program is that by providing children with skills to think about how to solve problems when they are very young, it will help decrease high-risk behaviors later in life that would otherwise hinder their chance for success and social competence.

## **Technology**

Begin With Us Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten classrooms have computers available for children to use within the PA Environmental Rating Scale Guidelines. Additionally, classrooms have iPads for the children to use. Teachers select applications that assist in teaching such skills as handwriting, math, and reading. Children are limited to no more than 15 minutes per day of any type of technology. Teachers select and screen applications and educational games to ensure children are receiving beneficial instruction during this time.

**“Children are apt to live up to what you believe of them.”**

~Lady Bird Johnson, Former First lady of the United States