



Positive Happenings Community Education Family Center

Family Center Coordinator: Cindy Saarela (651-982-8315)

A range of classes, activities, programs and services are available at the Family Center - supporting children and their families from birth to the first day of kindergarten.



The Family Center.....

..supports school success.

Children have opportunities to build independence and foundational skills in all developmental areas. Teachers and staff are licensed by the Mn Board of Teaching and facilitate a smooth transition to kindergarten.

..offers access to school based preschool classes.

New preschool classes are now available at Lino and Scandia elementary buildings. A strong start close to home.

..works with other community resources.

The Family Center works collaboratively with community partners such as Head Start, WIC, local child care providers, Childcare Resource & Referral and other county agencies to provide strong beginnings for all children.



Classes: 358 children are enrolled in weekly classes through the Family Center. Many classes include a day for parents to attend with their child and also participate in parent education.



Programs for infants and toddlers: The Family Center offers unique programming for infants, toddlers and their parents. Supporting parents during this critical time of development is the first step toward future success.

Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom

Family Center Becomes Research Site

In the spring of 2009, the Family Center was one of three schools in the nation invited to become a research site, in partnership with the Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. The two other partner sites are located in La Canada, California and Lincoln, Nebraska. The primary goal of this collaborative research project was to identify the skills preschool-age children are developing as they interact with nature, natural materials, peers and adults in a Nature Explore outdoor classroom. The Family Center houses the first Nature Explore classroom certified in Minnesota.

During the course of the 2009-10 research, Family Center teachers recorded over 60 “nature notes” (field documentation) as they observed preschoolers interacting and learning in the outdoor classroom space. Our analysis of this rich qualitative data revealed over 1,200 individual skills in the following areas:

- Social/emotional development
- Language and literacy
- Math
- Science
- Visual-spatial thinking
- Kinesthetic movement
- Intrapersonal development
- Construction/ and engineering
- Creative representation



Our findings also indicated that simple, open-ended natural materials such as sticks, “tree cookies” (slices of log) and dirt inspired the greatest amount of skill development. We found that child-directed exploration and discovery, which is vital to genuine learning, occurs readily in an enriched environment such as the Nature Explore classroom. Learning does not stop when children are outdoors!

Results of the study were presented by Family Center staff, Vicki Bohling and Cindy Saarela, at a national research symposium on outdoor learning in Nebraska City, Nebraska on July 26th, and again on November 4th at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) national conference in Anaheim, California.

Research continues in 2010-11 with a focus on parent involvement and infant/toddler skill development.