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# CurriculumGuide

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## Preschool

the **LernerSchool**  
Learning for Life

Bruchim HaBaim! Welcome to the Lerner Preschool, a vibrant, nurturing community where children laugh, learn, discover and play each day! At Lerner, authentic, hands-on experiences guide the children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. Children's natural creativity and curiosity are encouraged as they engage in fun activities that promote their individual strengths and offer them opportunities to meet new challenges. The keystone of our program is love – a love of children, a love of Judaism and a love of learning. Our inquiry-based integrated curriculum encourages children to ask questions and make connections as they learn about their world. Jewish culture, values, traditions, and customs blend seamlessly into each day's activities through music, language, literature, cooking and dramatic play, helping children develop a sense of self and, at the same time, helping them begin to understand what it means to be a member of a community. Families are always welcome to join in our weekly Kabbalat Shabbat celebration, Friday sing-along and Monday morning Havdallah, as we begin our week!

### **OUR CURRICULUM – LEARNING TO LEARN**

Lerner School's Five Star preschool program is founded in best practices. We use the Bank Street College of Education's innovative Explorations with Young Children as a framework for our engaging curriculum and utilize the North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development as we establish goals for each child according to his/her individual developmental stage. Our students' needs, interests and curiosities play a critical role in lesson planning. The children are empowered to co-author their educational journey, inspiring cooperation, creativity and problem-solving skills. Teachers nurture and guide the children to question, discover, test and exhibit new ideas in a developmentally appropriate way.

Lerner preschoolers organically experience literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, music and art while engaging in experiences that build confidence and skills, allow for open-ended exploration of materials and encourage a questioning young mind to explore new ideas. For example, through an ongoing class study of shoes using project based learning techniques, teachers crafted experiences that wove together math, science, literacy, social studies and Judaics. We measured the preschool hallway with shoes, cut a shoe in half to find out what was inside, invited guest speakers to share unique shoes, and turned our dramatic play area into a working shoe store, complete with a foot measuring brannock device and shoe shine kit! This approach to teaching offers children the opportunity to explore topics in a way that is both broad and deep, and teaches them to engage actively in the learning process– in preschool, in kindergarten and in years to come.

### **PLAY IS A CHILD'S WORK**

Guided by research of brain development, our teachers understand that children learn to focus their interests and make meaning of their experiences through collaborative play. The children have many opportunities to explore their world through play. Children learn flexibility of thought, risk-taking, problem-solving and independent thinking by recognizing challenges and trying to solve them. Teachers encourage children to try new techniques and to negotiate with others. Throughout their preschool years at Lerner, children learn persistence, attentiveness and responsibility within a framework that promotes imagination, creativity and invention.

The teachers use continual assessment that they monitor using benchmark records to help determine the pace and direction for class activities. The benchmarks are based on developmentally appropriate practice and are derived from our base curricula.

### **EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A JEWISH LENS**

Forming friendships and learning to be a contributing member of a community is a cornerstone of the Lerner curriculum. Our preschool students learn to appreciate differences and solve conflicts through a Jewish lens. We joyfully discuss the *mitzvot* (commandments) of taking care of one another, of kindness and of respect. We live the values of *derech erez* (good manners) through the school-wide Compassion Project. These values are reflected from the way children play on the playground to their participation in weekly PE classes, where collaborative games help children build independent physical skills, spatial awareness and cooperation.

### **LANGUAGE & FINE MOTOR DEVELOPMENT – THE FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNICATION**

Before children learn to read and write, they need strong receptive and expressive language skills. Our curriculum engages children in a variety of ways to help each child gain the foundation that they need to succeed as they enter elementary school. This foundation begins with the ability to process language. Beginning with our youngest children, teachers use conversations, gestures, facial expressions, songs and books to help children understand and use a rich, varied and always growing vocabulary. Teachers write down the children’s words and they learn that the written word has meaning. Lerner preschoolers are encouraged to communicate their wants and needs verbally, and to use increasingly complex language throughout their preschool years.

Preschoolers learn the skills that become the foundations for reading and writing. These include recognizing the concepts of print, the alphabet and phonology for reading and using symbols with meaning, writing scribbles with intention and, eventually, attempting to make letters for writing. Pre-reading skills foster a natural motivation to read; as teachers read books aloud, children develop the ability to comprehend what was read. We read every day – from books to recipes to signs – teachers create an authentic print-rich environment. Preschoolers visit the school library on a regular basis and our preschoolers in Kipodim and Yanshufim have an opportunity to read together with older students through our weekly “book buddies” program, which takes place in our beautiful Renee Price Reading Room.

Preschool students practice the fine motor skills that lead to a strong pencil-grip. Children use a variety of tools including droppers, tweezers, play-doh and even masking tape to develop these skills! We encourage children to scribble, draw and print with art and writing supplies that are always available for use during free choice and group activities. As children create a restaurant in the dramatic play center, our teachers encourage them to create a menu, take down each other’s food orders and even write up a bill! While art stations are a favorite spot in all of our classrooms, our rising Kindergarteners visit our studio for art lessons, which gives them another opportunity to practice their fine motor skills and have an outlet for free creative expression.

### **MATHEMATICAL THINKING & EXPRESSION**

Preschool age children are naturally curious. Children are guided in discoveries that allow them to gain an early understanding of mathematical concepts. Our preschoolers experiment with and use numbers and counting in their play, during circle time and in small groups. They are prompted to think and analyze both familiar and new situations through open-ended questions. While our youngest preschoolers solve the questions of “How many children are at school today?” and “How

many apples tall are you?” our oldest preschoolers are posed questions such as, “How will we figure out how many eggs we will need to make challah this week if we are baking a double portion?”

Teachers intentionally create a rich classroom and outdoor environment to give the children ample opportunities to practice counting, sorting, ordering, patterning, as well as number and shape recognition. Children also experiment with weights and measures – using both nonstandard and standard measures. They are introduced to concepts of time through use of picture schedules.

Many studies have documented the correlation between the development of an aptitude in music and an enhancement in math skills. All of our preschoolers attend music class each week, in addition to using music in the classrooms, to nurture these skills. Musical themes, such as rhythm, rhyme and movement improve memory power and boost brain function.

### SCIENTIFIC THINKING AND INVENTION

Children discover their world and construct new ideas by observing the environment using all five senses. We begin with an awareness of the natural world – conducting outdoor observations and noticing seasonal variations. Children form hypotheses and experiment to problem-solve in inventive ways. Together with the children, the teachers make representations of new findings through documentation such as picture graphs or observational drawings.

Environmental Literacy has its roots in preschool! Classroom plants and pets help the children learn to observe and care for living things. Recycling and shared responsibility for classroom chores teaches the children about the participatory nature of caring for their environment, which lies at the heart of Tikkun Olam. Our preschoolers feed the worms in our vermicular compost bins after snack and lunch and take great pride in harvesting treats such as strawberries, tomatoes and basil from our gardens. At Pesach, children plant parsley seeds in milk cartons, and are proud to use their parsley at the Passover Seder!

### SPOTLIGHT ON OUR OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

We extend the classroom learning by spending time outdoors each day, weather permitting. Our playground and preschool gardens are a wonder-filled outdoor learning environment. Here the children have an opportunity for both self-directed and teacher-guided play exploration. Our play structures provide ample opportunities for risk-taking within a safe environment and offer the children challenging and rewarding activities to match each stage of development, while helping to develop large muscle control, core strength and balance. The playground invites children to explore a variety of play and sensory equipment: the water wall, ball run, sound garden, balance bike tack, sand diggers and more. All of the opportunities that the children have to enhance their learning indoors are also available outdoors; we read books outside, explore art and engage in dramatic play. The Preschoolers take an active role in caring for their outdoor classroom and for the plants and animals that we observe outside.

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