

# Play-Based Learning

The idea of play-based education is not new, nor uncommon to many educators or families. We know that children thrive on choice-centered “free” play to explore interests, express emotions and connect with others. In Skyview’s Kindergarten classrooms the students are continually engaged in just such activities throughout the day and subject areas. Our “Choice Centered” curriculum allows students to be directed by their own interests, ability levels all while reinforcing and nurturing newly learned skills.

At any given moment, you may walk into our classrooms and find children involved in a game, singing a song, dancing, creating projects and more. Throughout math, language arts and the sciences students are guided through ample opportunities to explore through “play”. Within these academic blocks students are acquiring knowledge by driving their own learning. In addition to the core content areas, each classroom has a period of the day devoted solely to “Choice Centers”. It is during this time that many of our students’ lights burn brightest...exploring, imagining and creating.

In Choice Centers students are invited to choose their own activities. Our rooms are exploding with options such as building blocks, nature centers, Legos, puzzles, writing materials, resting spaces, art centers, science tables, kitchens and more! Upon witnessing this time of day you might see kids cooking in a “restaurant”, creating a puppet show performance, building a train track or engineering a city. To many, this appears to be simply “play time”. Yet if you take the time to look (and LISTEN!) more deeply you will see a whole world come forth that the kids have created on their own.

During this time of “play” students are learning critical life and academic skills. In the kitchen, students are working as a team to take orders, wash dishes, prepare the food, serve the customers and take turns doing so. In the puppet theater, is not uncommon to see typically shy or reserved students step forth and try out big voices, strong personalities and silly behaviors. When building racecar or train tracks, the kids must work together, make decisions, find compromises and become involved in greater concepts such as science and engineering. Even an activity like drawing can unite and ignite friendships where students calmly and freely sit together to create art.

There are quiet days and loud days. There are times when it’s loud...messy... seemingly chaotic. But each time we sit back and truly watch the learning unfold it is amazing. As adults we aren’t used to this unstructured behavior. It is incredibly eye-opening to witness a group of students engaged in authentic

behaviors, working towards common goals and developing crucial social skills. The benefits of play-based education goes far beyond building friendships and working together. Through exploratory play students will:

- ~ Develop and apply linguistic and mathematical skills through problem solving, brainstorming, list making, storytelling and more
- ~ Build expressive and receptive communication skills by talking directly with peers in comfortable, child-centered scenarios
- ~ Release and/or avoid stress, anxiety and tension through joyful interaction with friends
- ~ Engage in group and team exercises, learning how to self-advocate, compromise, and lead
- ~ Develop strong self-esteem while building social-emotional skills critical to future successes.

The list goes on and on. The bottom line is simple, in Kindergarten, we know how to play. By exploring new territory, testing ideas, finding solutions and creating a land of play, students have truly come together as a tightly knit Kindergarten community. And looking beyond our collective group, you will find our individual students, rooted in their own pride, creativity and strengths. You will find the children themselves, acting as their own guides, driving their own learning...engaged, excited and most importantly, HAPPY. Enough talk...let's get back to PLAY!