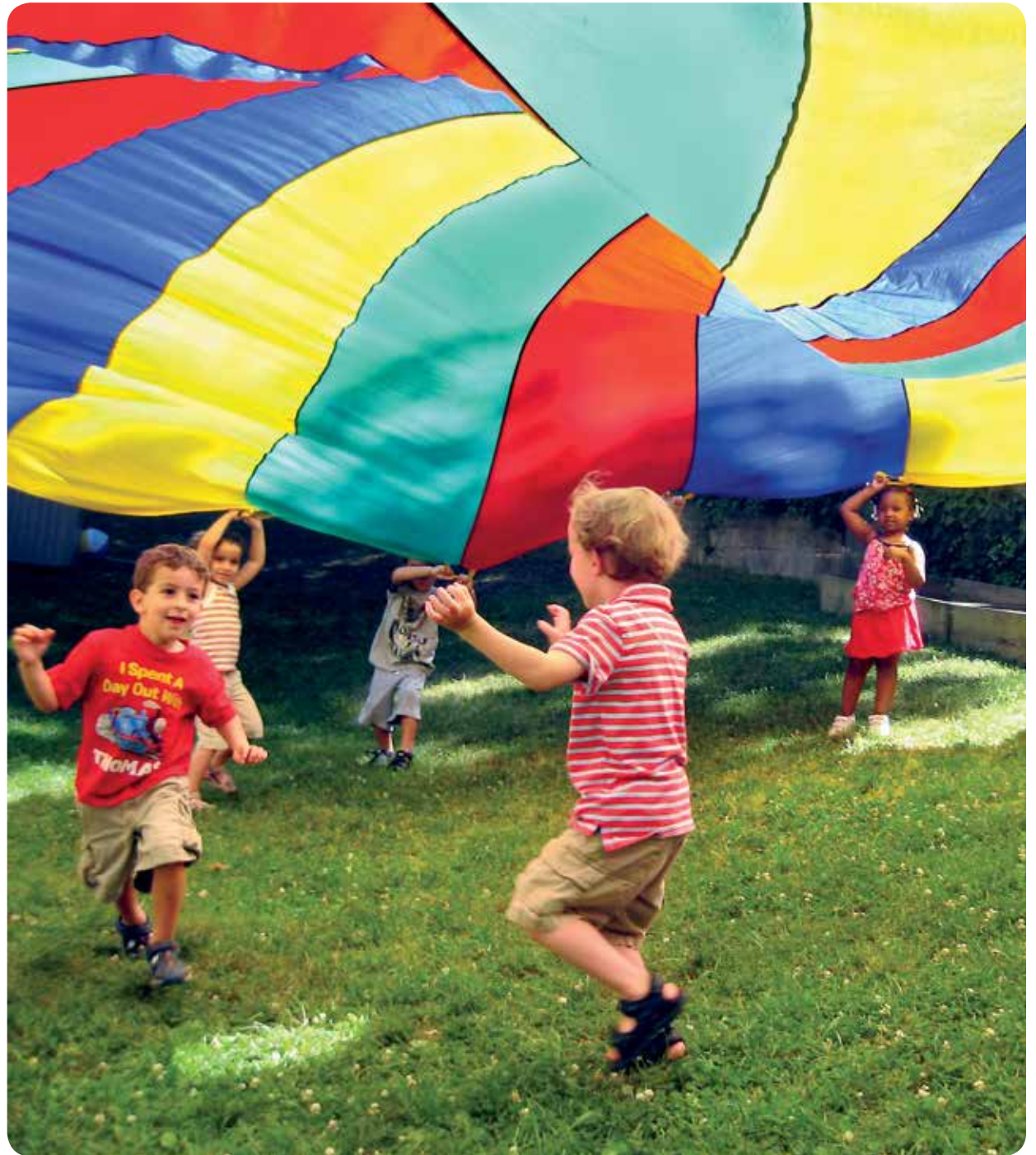


**Curriculum  
Guide  
Pre-Primary  
School**



## MISSION

Lowell's mission is to create an inclusive community of life-long learners in which each individual is valued and respected.

## PHILOSOPHY

Lowell honors the individuality of each child. We give children time and space to grow and nurture the strengths of each individual. A fundamental understanding of the developmental stages of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth informs all that we do with children. We foster intellectual and emotional self-reliance, with a guiding value of respect for each other. This approach provides the foundation for children to be highly motivated learners with a strong sense of self-worth and efficacy.

Lowell promotes active, collaborative learning with an emphasis on building conceptual understanding and developing strong creative, critical, and analytical thinking. Carefully designed learning experiences and curricula are integrated across subjects, draw on powerful, relevant content and student interests, and support the development of internal motivation and a strong voice. Learning at Lowell is rigorous: thinking is emphasized over rote learning, and students are expected to use their knowledge and skills creatively and practically. High expectations of students are coupled with appropriate scaffolding so that students know what to aim for and how to get there. In this way, Lowell prepares students to be innovators and achievers who have the flexibility, skills, and inclination to solve problems new and old.

Lowell is an intentionally diverse school. This is essential in preparing students for a future that will demand deep multicultural understanding, strong collaborative skills, and commitment to one's local community and the larger world. At Lowell, we believe that an inclusive community contributes to intellectual stimulation and nurtures an inquisitive and open mind.

A watercolor illustration of the Lowell School building, featuring a prominent clock tower and a bridge in the foreground. The style is soft and artistic, with a color palette of blues, greens, and yellows.

LOWELL  
SCHOOL



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Supr-MAGIC  
IGGLE Notion  
CARAMEL. LOTS of  
APPLE ICE CANDY  
Aid of & scary  
PUMPKIN SEEDS  
STIR UNDER A FULL MOON

# A Developmental Approach to Teaching

**L**earning occurs as children strive to make sense of the world around them. Children construct their understanding of the world by interacting with adults, peers, and the learning environment.

At Lowell, opportunities abound for exploration, discovery, and learning. Teachers act as facilitators and guides, maximizing children's opportunities for learning and helping them acquire strong foundational skills at a developmentally appropriate pace.

## Play is the Work of Young Children

Play is an important part of young children's development. The richness of children's daily play supports their learning across the domains—social-emotional development, communication, literacy, health and physical development, and cognitive development. In the Pre-Primary School, we refer to what children do in their everyday play as their "work." This is why teachers often ask children *What materials are you working with?* or *Who did you work with today?* or *I noticed you were working with digging tools.*

Play is an essential way that children make sense of what is happening around them. They take things they have seen or heard and try them out in new settings, first imitating what they have observed and then extending their play based on their own experiences and knowledge. From this process and with the help of teachers, they develop the skills to build on learning and create new knowledge.

When children are stimulated and interested, they are motivated to seek out additional information and new experiences that lead to the construction of new knowledge. Children's play, their work, is intrinsically interesting to them and thus, presents important opportunities for learning.

## The Role of Teachers

Lowell teachers recognize that children must be invested in constructing their own learning. It is the role of the teacher to generate activities, projects, and ideas for conversations that will help children develop the skills that will allow them to move on to new challenges. Teachers also provide the developmentally appropriate materials, support, and guidance that children need.

Lowell teachers are keen observers of children and take daily notes to support their planning and extension of children's work. Planning often includes identifying age-appropriate, individual, and group goals; developing balanced classroom schedules; and structuring activities and interactions to meet the needs of all children.

**Children's play, their work, is intrinsically interesting to them and thus, presents important opportunities for learning.**

# Introduction to the Curriculum

The Pre-Primary program embraces a child-centered approach called the “emergent curriculum.” It is based on and evolves with the students’ interests and passions and is guided by the teachers’ knowledge and commitment.

It allows children’s interests to become the subject matter of some curricular exploration, while developmental milestones across the domains of learning form the foundation of our curriculum.

Children are naturally curious about the world around them and about themselves and others. Teachers support their learning and facilitate their progress in all developmental domains.

For example, children’s curiosity about the night sky might be a jumping off point for teachers to help students develop literacy skills as they read and discuss books about the stars and planets. As students work with the art teacher to create a three-dimensional model of the solar system, they make use of materials in a sensory way and learn how to tackle the challenges of working with *papier mâché*, glue, balloons, and other messy materials. The art teacher might also help students plan and problem solve or encourage them to look at pictures and models for more detail. Throughout their study of the night sky, children engage in dialogue as they plan, work with materials, and reflect on the process. This presents an opportunity for teachers to observe expressive and receptive language skills and to help children develop further in these areas.

Involving children in shaping the curriculum helps them realize that they are thinkers, information seekers, problem solvers, and risk takers. They realize that school is a place they can go to find out more. They ask questions and feel at ease exploring ideas and materials that lead to the discovery of connections and relationships, as well as to the comparison, analysis, and synthesis of information.





# Developmental Domains

## Social-Emotional Development

Between the ages of three and five, children need to be developing important social and emotional skills that are essential to their well-being and success in school and life.

## Physical Development and Health

Physical development encompasses muscle development, stamina, coordination, the ability to take care of one's self, and overall health, including eating and sleeping habits.

## Language and Communication

Language development encompasses the ability to build a comprehensive vocabulary, organize and effectively convey messages, speak with clarity and fluency, participate in meaningful conversations, and gain competency in one or more languages.

## Literacy

Teachers recognize that literacy skills are comprehensive and involve listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

## Cognitive Development

Cognitive development involves the ability to learn, problem solve, make sense of information, and think on an abstract level.

We consider social-emotional development the keystone in a child's life.





# Lowell uses Developmental Domains as a Framework for Effective Teaching

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When children feel safe, they trust in their community and are free to take social and intellectual risks—to ask a friend to play, experiment with colors and shapes, sing a song or share an event with peers and teachers, come to the aid of others, and seek new challenges. We consider social-emotional development the keystone in a child's life and place considerable emphasis on four primary areas: self-identity, emotional development, social play, and pro-social behavior.

Through careful observations of social interactions and relationships, teachers support children individually and collectively. Teachers spend a major part of the day coaching children, helping them to help themselves, thereby working through social and emotional issues and building self-esteem. They also facilitate small and large group meetings and select literature to provoke conversations about feelings.

The social curriculum is built into all activities and routines in a way that promotes social skill development, multicultural understanding and engagement, and community-building. At the same time, our teachers explicitly explore and teach social curriculum topics such as friendship, caring for others, self-control, and conflict resolution.

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

Teachers specifically focus on skills that contribute to a child's physical well-being and that support the development of skills in the sub-domains—large motor, small motor, and self-help skills—which are essential to academic success down the road. Time is set aside each day for snack and relaxation.

Children move to different areas of the school environment throughout the day and the week, satisfying their basic need and desire to move. Outdoor time is scheduled daily on our spacious playground, which provides opportunities for climbing, running, riding vehicles, connecting with the natural environment, and playing unstructured and structured games.

Inside, students continue their physical education in the Willow Room, which is equipped with materials for locomotion, balance, throwing, and catching. Work in the Willow Room strengthens core, hand, and arm muscles while encouraging cooperative play. Teachers make sure each session includes a warm-up and a cool-down.

Work with manipulatives and pegboards offers many opportunities for children to develop the fine motor skills—such as eye-hand coordination, finger dexterity, visual perception, memory, and handedness—that are a pre-requisite for writing and other learning in the primary years.

## LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Teachers consciously work with children to acquire the skills necessary to listen to and understand what is being communicated verbally and non-verbally, as well as respond verbally and non-verbally to messages. Receptive, expressive, and pragmatic language skills are emphasized.

Verbalizing, reading, and writing are intertwined and therefore simultaneously fostered. A major part of the school day is spent in formal and informal conversation among and between teachers and children. During Morning Meeting, children have time to think out loud and express what is important to them without competing with other speakers. Respecting one another helps children to listen to and learn from their peers. When conflict arises, teachers help children express their needs. Feelings, whether positive or negative, are always acknowledged. Thus, children feel free to express themselves.

**Verbalizing, reading,  
and writing are intertwined  
and therefore  
simultaneously fostered.**



**Teachers consciously help children develop the tools they need to become fluent readers and writers and focus on three primary areas: phonological awareness, print awareness, and book awareness.**

### **LITERACY**

For children ages three, four, and five, literacy skills are emergent—in the process of developing. Teachers consciously help children develop the tools they need to become fluent readers and writers and focus on three primary areas: phonological awareness, print awareness, and book awareness.

Children learn to write by dictating what they need to say. Teachers capture children’s feelings with pen and paper when they want those feelings conveyed to parents or peers. The desire to write or dictate “I miss you” to a family member or to send a thank-you note to a visitor are powerful motivations for developing literacy skills. Children also practice writing during dramatic play.

Careful looking is constantly encouraged to help children become aware of written language. Signs, written in words and drawn in rebuses, indicate where materials are stored. During the daily read-aloud, teachers talk about the author and illustrator and ask students to predict what the story might be about by looking at the cover, reading expressions on the characters’ faces, and analyzing different aspects of the story. Books by the same author or on the same subject are read for comparison. Rhymes and rhythm games are also part of story time.

### **COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Thinking takes place on a concrete level with movement to a more abstract level as children mature. Mathematical and scientific thinking, as well as general knowledge about the world, curiosity, and imagination are included in this domain and encompass the ability to sort and classify, to comprehend numbers, time, and measurement, and to think critically, using reason and logic.

Children are natural scientists. They observe, wonder, question, make theories, and then test and modify them. Teachers foster what already comes naturally without interrupting the child’s process of discovery with ready-made answers. Teachers ask children to notice patterns in the environment, in literature, and when working with materials. There are many opportunities in children’s everyday play to notice similarities and differences and apply analytical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Teachers also provide materials such as manipulatives and puzzles that encourage children to sort, match, compare, and observe patterns. Working with puzzles and pegboards requires abstract reasoning and the ability to focus and solve problems.

# Curriculum and Goals Chart

**S**ocial, emotional, and academic growth are very much intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Lowell teachers pay close attention to each child's well-being across all domains of development to ensure that all children reach their full potential as students and as contributing members of the community within and beyond Lowell.

Teachers purposefully and thoughtfully plan for learning, taking cues from the children's interests and maintaining a steady focus on developmental domains, sub-domains, and age-appropriate milestones.

	1. Social-Emotional Development	2. Physical Development
Sub-Domains and Developmental Milestones	<b>Self-Identity</b> Separates from parent Explores a variety of materials Expresses self creatively (art, music, movement/dance)	<b>Large Motor Skills</b> Throws, catches, and kicks a ball Jumps, hops, and gallops Demonstrates sufficient stamina to participate in activities
	<b>Emotional Development</b> Participates in activities Accepts redirection Uses words to express feelings	<b>Small Motor Skills</b> Uses drawing and writing tools with control Uses small manipulatives Draws simple representational figures
	<b>Social Play</b> Has friends Successfully enters a group and sustains play with at least one peer Extends dramatic play with props and new ideas	<b>Self-help Skills</b> Puts on own socks and shoes Takes care of belongings Uses toilet independently
	<b>Pro-Social Behavior</b> Uses materials appropriately Shows concern and offers help to others Demonstrates self control	

### 3. Language and Communication

#### Receptive Language

- Answers who and what questions
- Understands directional cues (over, under, behind)
- Attends during story and group meetings

#### Expressive Language

- Speaks clearly enough for adults to understand
- Contributes to group discussions
- Retells a simple story or event

#### Pragmatic Language

- Greets peers and teachers
- Participates in conversation with other children
- Responds to verbal and non-verbal cues

### 4. Literacy

#### Phonological awareness

- Recognizes rhyming words
- Begins to associate words with letters
- Claps a rhythm

#### Print knowledge

- Understands that print has meaning
- Identifies classroom labels
- Identifies some letters and numbers

#### Book knowledge

- Pretends to read
- Scans pictures for meaning
- Dictates simple stories

### 5. Cognitive Development

#### Math

- Sorts objects into categories
- Creates and extends simple patterns
- Explores part-whole relationships

#### Science

- Is curious about cause and effect events
- Makes predictions
- Draws simple conclusions based on observations

**Children are natural scientists. They observe, wonder, question, make theories, and then test and modify them. Teachers foster what already comes naturally without interrupting the process with ready-made answers.**



# The Learning Environment

**A**t Lowell, we believe inquiry begins with a provocation to know more. Teachers actively engage students in the process of inquiry, providing children with rich, stimulating materials and opportunities that are both thoughtfully planned and delightfully spontaneous.

Whether indoors participating in experiments or exploring cause and effect events, teachers capture the moment to investigate and contemplate the “whys” and “what-ifs.” On the playground, children can be found climbing, jumping, digging, running, hauling, raking, watering, and riding vehicles as well as planning, gathering, collaborating, collecting bugs, investigating nests and nooks, and watching the clouds go by.

Each Pre-Primary classroom is well equipped with manipulatives, books, and other materials for dramatic play, art, block play, and writing; however, classrooms differ depending on the age and interests of the children. Teachers observing and listening to the children determine what additional equipment and materials to bring into the classroom throughout the year. When, in one classroom, several children go for their 4-year-old check-ups and begin to talk about their visits with each other, the teacher might set up a doctor’s office in the corner of the room for dramatic play. Discussions of sleeping and dreaming might be the provocation for a bed-building project in the classroom.

Kalmia Creek and over eight acres of land provide a rich outdoor learning environment and a natural extension to our classrooms.

Our playground, affectionately referred to as The Yard, offers numerous and varied opportunities to move as well as to explore and ponder. Basic equipment such as balls, tricycles, hoops, buckets, and shovels are used to extend children’s play ideas and work with peers. Embankment slides, sand pits, and a playhouse offer more opportunities for climbing, sliding, upper body work, dramatic play, and excavation.



# Highlights of a Week

Over the course of a week, children in both the half-day and full-day programs take part in a variety of engaging activities that help support their development. Children participating in the full-day program have the opportunity to participate in multi-age groupings and a variety of enrichment activities that support skill building in the developmental domains. These activities might include cooking, art studio, Spanish, sign-language, and outdoor time.

A wide range of resource materials and specialists in art, dance, music, and physical education are readily available to teachers. In addition, teachers have access to the in-house School Counselor and Director of Learning Services, as well as outside consultants.

## Morning Meeting

Morning Meeting is the foundation of community building and is key to setting a positive tone for the day. It is a valuable component of our school-wide program. Each day, children gather with their teachers to welcome one another to School, share news, and learn about the day ahead.

## Choice Time

Lowell teachers understand that the ways children construct knowledge are connected to the opportunities they have to make choices in their learning. Choice time allows children to explore their interests, to find out what they care about, and to experience and find their own strengths and weaknesses. By giving children the opportunity to make choices in their learning, teachers are preparing children to be strong problem-solvers and decision-makers—to be critical and creative thinkers. Choice time fosters children's independence and ownership of their work.

## Physical Education

Large motor and sensory processing are important components of our early childhood program. Specific activities and equipment are thoughtfully introduced to build skills, strength, and endurance so that children can become competent, comfortable, and adept movers. Cooperation and healthy play are emphasized in every class activity, thus creating an environment that is safe and fun for everyone.

## Library Time

The Book Nook supplies books for each Pre-Primary room, and children are able to borrow books to take home. Library activities for older students include author and illustrator studies, as well as thematic units. Books are taken home in green school bags and returned to School the next week. Parents also have borrowing privileges.

Parents actively support the Book Nook; they volunteer to read on designated days and shelve and check out books.

## Science

Every day, teachers nurture children's sense of wonder. Believing that good science education is based on active, student-centered, and problem-based inquiry, they encourage children to learn about their physical environment using a framework involving exploration, observation, prediction, communication, and drawing conclusions. The children's growing sense of the physical world is expanded through the use of materials, the classroom setup, and teacher-facilitated discussions. Mathematical skills of counting, comparing, and measuring are also applied to scientific problems and promote further exploration.



## Foreign Language

Children are exposed to Spanish through songs, stories, and various classroom activities such as Morning Meeting, washing hands, lining up, and making transitions. As they participate in these activities, children learn vocabulary and develop their listening skills. Formal Spanish instruction starts in Kindergarten.

## Dance

Through dance, children discover what it means to be a kind friend when they give each other space to move or when they hold hands to dance in a circle. Older students begin to notice the spatial patterns and rhythms of their dance experience. Rhythms and patterns of movement from around the world are also celebrated through simple folk structures and creative movement.

Laughing together at the joy of make-believe or participating in a gleeful romp provides a sense of oneness and community as children dance together in the studio. Music, poetry, stories, props, and simple costumes add to the creative dance experience.

Opportunities to learn and grow are maximized when children are calm and focused, so yoga is integrated into the dance experience in the Pre-Primary School. Thoughtfully set and carefully practiced limits are also a part of the learning experience.

## Music

Pre-Primary music is first and foremost about enjoying the experience, but there are also many underlying benefits. Children develop their singing voices through simple songs and learn to recognize a beat and clap along to music. They are also encouraged to sing or play an instrument at the correct time and use a specific rhythm or set of words. In addition, they are encouraged to improve their social and emotional skills as they work together on a song, and they improve their gross and fine motor skills through movement to music and by playing instruments and doing finger plays. Music at Lowell, therefore, teaches the whole child.

## Creative Arts

At Lowell, we foster children's creative thinking by providing hands-on experiences that allow children to explore and interact with different materials and ideas. In the Art Studio children are both idea makers and creative problem solvers. They explore art materials, and they are introduced to processes such as printmaking, collage, weaving, and sewing. Children are encouraged to ponder *What happens when I poke, press, or pull the clay ball in my hand? If I put yellow on top of blue what will happen next?* In the beginning, the questions are elementary. As the year progresses, children move on to more challenging questions such as *How can I make my structure move? How do I include others in this mural?* The oldest of our young artists begin to explore collaborative art projects like creating shows, movies, or puppet theatre.

## MORNING MEETING COMPONENTS

### The Greeting

During the Greeting, everyone uses each other's names, establishing a friendly and inclusive tone. The Greeting can be any type of appropriate or meaningful message for the group. Teachers of older children may translate hello or good morning into different languages, reflecting the different nationalities of children in their class.

### Sharing

During Sharing, children have the opportunity to share things, events, and feelings that matter to them. They learn about others, and others learn about them. Sharing focuses on being a good listener as much as being a competent speaker. Thus, Morning Meeting is also an opportunity for children to develop expressive and receptive language skills.

### Group Activity

The Group Activity is short, fast paced, and enjoyable. It usually involves problem solving or the introduction of a new concept or material, and it allows everyone to participate and contribute at his/her own level. Teachers often incorporate songs, games, poems, and chart activities. Activities are interactive, inclusive of everyone, and cooperative in nature.

### Morning Message and Announcements

The written and verbal messages offered during this component of the meeting inform children about the day's expectations. The Daily News chart is critical in terms of motivating and teaching reading and language arts skills in a meaningful way, as well as supporting emerging math skills.

# Pre-Primary School Nuts and Bolts

## Classrooms

There is a 6–9 month age range in each classroom:

Discovery Room—2½-year-olds and younger 3-year-olds

Explorers Room—older 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds

Sunflower Room—4-year-olds and 5-year-olds

Adventurers Room—4-year-olds and 5-year-olds

## Placement

Typically, children who enter Lowell at age 2½ or 3 spend two years in the Pre-Primary program. Factors considered when placing children include:

- chronological age
- developmental progress
- the diversity and balance in each classroom

As part of the placement process, the Director of Pre-Primary School solicits input from teachers and consults with parents. The Director makes final placement decisions.

## The Transition to Kindergarten

Students beginning the school year at age 4 or older are potentially age-eligible for Kindergarten the following year. The average age in Kindergarten is 5 ½ with most children beginning at least as old as 5.

The decision of when to start Kindergarten is based on developmental readiness as assessed by current teachers against benchmarks that have proven to be effective predictors of success in Kindergarten. Other factors such as emotional sturdiness and the ability to take risks are also considered. The decision is made by the School in discussion with the parent(s) or guardian(s).

## Morning Only and All Day Options

Families have two options for enrolling children in the Pre-Primary School:

- Morning Only—five-day week, 8:00 am–12:15 pm
- All Day—five-day week, 8:00 am–3:15 pm

## After School Care

Families with children in the All Day Program have the option of signing up for Lowell's After School Program (ASP), which operates from 3:15 pm–6:00 pm and can be used on a regular or drop-in basis. In ASP, children are placed in mixed-age groupings under the care of experienced adults. In addition, Pre-Primary School children are eligible to participate in some after-school minicourses and instrumental music and swimming lessons for an additional fee.

## Potty Training

Children entering the Pre-Primary School need to be potty trained. However, the teachers work with families to help children making the transition to school.

## Relaxation Time

From 1:00–2:00 pm every day, children slow down and either take a nap or relax quietly on cots to help them recharge their bodies for the rest of the day. Children have the option of listening quietly to stories read on tape during this time.

## Snack and Lunch

All children have snack mid-morning each day, and children in the All Day Program take a break for lunch at noon. Parents are asked to pack healthy, nut-free snacks and lunches.





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