

SJCC ECS MERCER ISLAND

IDENTITY CARD

History of the Early Childhood School

We value the legacy of our school and always hold in mind where we've been as we move through our journey of growth. Please see attached "a timeline of growth in our school."

Inspiring Jewish Journeys

The SJCC Early Childhood School is an inclusive community. We approach Judaism from a pluralistic perspective with great focus on the customs, traditions and holidays of the religion. We naturally integrate Judaism's middot and mitzvot, or morals and values, in our classrooms and school and we believe Judaism's core values are truly universal.

Our families and faculty members come from varied backgrounds. Our children come from homes where one parent is Jewish, both parents are Jewish, and where neither parent is Jewish. We have faculty members of both Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds. Our families and faculty members come from a variety of countries and backgrounds that lead to a wealth of cultural knowledge and a diversity of languages. We believe this diversity is what brings our community together and Judaism is a common ground for us to be united culturally.

Here are values, or middot, that serve as the foundation for the work of our school:

Shalom Bayit (peaceful home): This value teaches that everyone deserves to live in a home of respect and peace, where varied practices and beliefs are honored. For our school community, the concept of Shalom Bayit provides a foundation of respect and understanding, ultimately creating a "home" in which everyone is valued.

Tikkum Olam (repairing the world): This value teaches that it is everyone's responsibility to act thoughtfully with the best interest of our world in mind. This value is all-encompassing and ties into many of the ongoing projects in which our classrooms engage.

G'miliut Hasadim (acts of loving kindness): This value teaches of each individual's responsibility to perform acts of kindness, elevating those who need love and support.

K'hillah Yarukah (green community): Through our community's focus on sustainability, we aspire to live as a green community. We live this value at school; many of our families follow similar practice in their own homes.

B'Tzelem Elohim (divine potential): This Jewish value teaches that we are made in the image of G-d. We use B'Tzelem Elohim as a lens through which to view relationships and foster the concept of social justice in our school. This enables us to recognize similarities, celebrate differences, and learn from one another.

Tzedakah (charity and justice): Through the giving of *tzedakah*, in all its various forms, our children and families help those in need through meaningful donation and charitable giving.

Talmud Torah (the value of learning): A true love of learning is cultivated in our children, as we believe we are all lifelong learners. Each day our children's knowledge is nurtured.

These values are just a few examples of how Jewish values are truly universal and speak to all of the members of our community, regardless of personal religious background.

Another aspect of Judaism that helps to shape our school's identity is the celebration of Jewish holidays, rituals, and traditions.

The Jewish calendar guides us and helps to deepen our connection to the rhythms of each day, week, month, and year. For example, the light and sweet spices of Havdallah provides us with a sweet beginning to each week and braiding Challah and coming together for a community lunch on Shabbat provides us with a meaningful closure to the week. In the same way, planting seeds on Tu B'shevat leads to a community harvest on Sukkot. Each holiday is celebrated through learning its history and participation in cultural traditions: food, song, dance, and the creation of ritual objects. The way we explore the holidays leaves room for everyone to identify with some aspect of the story or traditions.

Our approach to Judaism is complemented by the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Both Judaism and Reggio-inspired practice honor the individual in the context of a strong, inclusive community. Cultural identity is very important to both Judaism and the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Thus, our all-inclusive approach is built upon these two major pillars of our school: Judaism and Reggio Emilia. It is our hope that children and families in our school will be inspired to form a strong, meaningful Jewish identity through authentic experiences.

Green School/Sustainability

Our Sustainability Committee

This parent led committee was developed in 2010. Learning is at the heart of change. We believe that in order to see change in the future, we need to teach our children the importance of earth stewardship and sustainable living. If we teach them how to care for our planet, then they will go out into the world and spread that knowledge and make it a better place. Our mission is to ensure that children who go through the SJCC ECS program come out of the program with a simple, clear understanding of what it means to "take care of the earth" and that through learning this, they actually grow to care about these issues themselves.

Compost and Recycle

The effort to create *K'hillah Yarukah* at the J began in September 2009 when two passionate ECS moms, Nancy Weil and Amy Wolff, launched the Sustainability Committee. With the full support of the ECS Leadership Team, their main objective was to create a recycling and composting program in all 17 classrooms of our Mercer Island school campus. By educating teachers, children and parents, the program was effortlessly implemented. Within three months, the amount of garbage collected in the school was reduced by more than half; recycling doubled. The Seattle ECS campus followed Mercer Island's lead and introduced the program into their classrooms.

Since the inception of the committee, the effort to increase sustainability has continued to expand. As members walk through the center, they will see clearly labeled recycling, compost and trash bins in all areas of the building. The J Café has also adopted *K'hilah Yarukah* by using compostable cups, lids, napkins, straws, and flatware. We ask our members and visitors join us in this initiative by taking the extra time to make sure waste is being discarded in the correct receptacle. If there are any questions, feel free to ask our knowledgeable staff members at the J Café.

SJCC ECS Community Garden

The ECS Community Garden was started by a group of teachers. The committee hosts an annual planting day in the spring, inviting parents and children to participate. The garden is then cared for and harvested by the teachers and children. The teachers often use the fresh herbs and vegetables when they prepare Shabbat lunches on Friday.

Recycled Materials Studio

Our recycled materials center is a project that represents a new, optimistic, and proactive way of approaching environmentalism and building change through giving value to reject materials, imperfect products, and otherwise worthless objects, to foster new opportunities for communication and creativity in a perspective of respect for objects, the environment, and human beings. The recycled material studio embraces a core value of our school Tikkun Olam, our responsibility to repair and take care of the world. When we recycle materials and give them new life we are showing children the role they play in being responsible and thoughtful about our environment. *"Remida (recycled materials) offers an opportunity to translate the sense of social and environmental responsibility into concrete actions, highlighting "remainders", a world of elements and traces*

that, upon leaving industrial production, no longer have value but can receive a new life at Remida in other forms, taking on new and diversified identities.” –Remida Center, Reggio Emilia, Italy

SJCC Keshar (Community) Garden

The mission of the SJCC Keshar Garden is to cultivate community by the blending of human values and education with the Earth's natural life cycle through cooperative organic gardening and stewardship. The SJCC Keshar Community Garden consists of 12 10'x10' patches, a small community orchard, beehive as well as a children's learning garden. Each patch is individually rented.

Rights

The Rights of Children

“All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity; they have interest in the relationship, in constructing their own learning, and in negotiating with everything the environment brings to them. Children should be considered as active citizens with rights, as contributing members, with their families, of their local community.”
Leila Gandini

The way we perceive the child is fundamental in our work as everything we do is directly related to this image. We see the child as competent, capable, and as the protagonist in their own learning. We understand that the early years of a child's life are full of wonder and discovery of the world around them. We believe the child has the right to nurturing caregivers and an environment that supports their learning and is inclusive of their individual identity as well as that of their family. It is our passion to support the growth of children in becoming confident, compassionate individuals with a deep love of learning.

Education is a right of all and it is the responsibility of the community to provide opportunity for growth, gaining of knowledge, provide a meeting place for freedom and learning to live together in peace. We believe that in a system of relationships that this right exists for each child. In our school we promote the rights and potentials of the children by fostering relationships, autonomy, creativity and learning.

The Rights of Teachers

The role of the teacher is a delicate balance of many different responsibilities. The teacher is combination of nurturer, caregiver, educator, documenter, and advocate of the child. The teacher works side by side with the parent to develop systems to support the development and growth of each child. The teacher delights in the child's experiences and is inspired to make their learning visible to the community.

The teacher has a deep passion for life-long learning and is inspired to study and participate in an active dialogue with co-teachers and other members of the learning community. The teacher has the right to professional development to support this active learning process.

The Rights of Parents

The parent has the right to be an active participant of the classroom community whose understanding of the child is valued and welcomed. The parent is a partner in the learning process and provides invaluable knowledge of the child. We believe in the importance of the presence of the role parent in the classroom community and throughout the school. We greatly value the voice of the parent in decision making and planning the evolution of our school. Parents work together with the administration and teachers throughout the year to plan celebrations, discuss changes in our school, and collaborate to create the most meaningful experience for children and families.

Philosophy

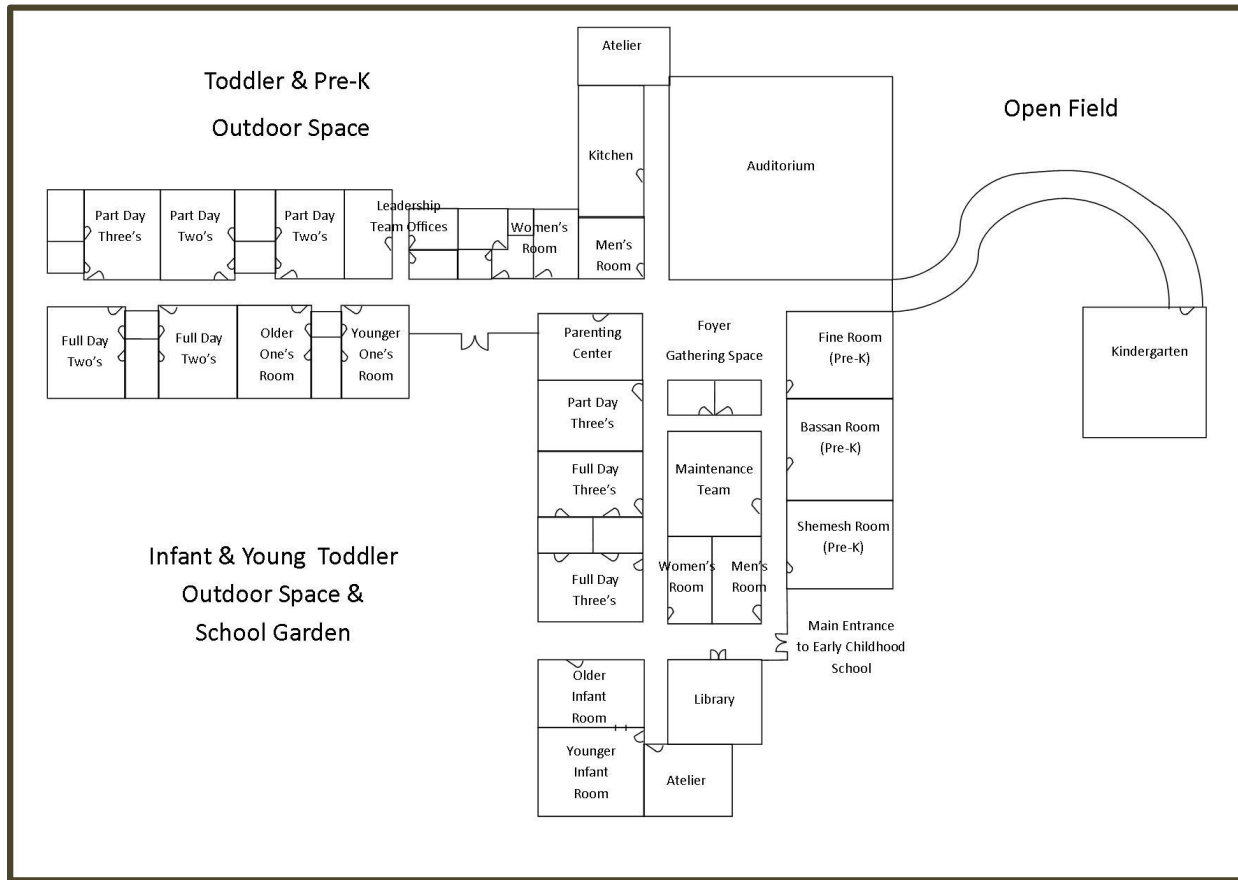
“Principles of the Educational Project, taken from Indications Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centers of the Municipality Reggio Emilia”

- **Children are the protagonists of their growth and development process**
We see that children are naturally curious and have interests about the world around them. The environment and provocations provided by teachers are based upon the interests and curiosities of the children. This framework allows children to be the protagonists in their growth and development.
- **The Hundred Languages**
We believe that children can express themselves in “hundred languages” and that we use this term as a metaphor. We see clay, painting, music, drawing, and building all as examples of languages that children use to express and to make meaning of world they live in.
- **Participation**
Participation is an implication that we see as a key principle in defining our philosophy. It exists in a triangle of relationships between the teacher, child and parent. Full participation allows for a multitude of perspectives to be shared and dialogued as we come together as a community.
- **Listening**
Listening is an ongoing process that exists between the teacher, child and parent that allows for openness and authentic dialogue. Listening requires us to also take into consideration the environment we exist in and how it plays a role in our relationships.
- **Learning as a process of individual and group construction**
We see that each child is an active participant in the construction of their knowledge. The ongoing process of construction takes place alongside participation, listening and educational research.
- **Educational Research**
Children are engaged in long-term, in-depth studies and have opportunities to explore ideas through a variety of visual, artistic, dramatic, and musical tools. During a long term project, both the child and the teacher are researchers, sharing in the learning process. We consider the co-researcher relationship as an important part of project work.
- **Educational Documentation**
In our school documentation makes the process of learning and understanding visible in a public forum. Documentation synthesizes observations and is a celebration of each individual child as a capable and competent citizen.
- **Organization**
When we present materials in an organized fashion, children use the materials in an intentional way. And when we offer materials to children in this way, children respect and place value on their work and their classroom environment. When we present a beautiful environment, the children that inhabit it understand that we respect them. They understand that we feel that their work is important
- **Environment, spaces and relations**
The schools in Reggio Emilia place much emphasis on the aesthetics of their environments and the materials offered to children. The environment plays an integral role in inviting the children to ask questions and delve into deeper study. Teachers are very intentional about the materials that they bring into the classroom and they carefully organize spaces. Documentation of the work of the children and the reflections of the teachers are displayed in the classrooms and throughout the school with the intention of making learning visible.
- **Professional Development**
We value professional development as a school and see ourselves as lifelong learners. Teachers have opportunities to study locally, nationally and internationally. We all set aside time on a weekly basis to study and we close a few time throughout the year to study and learn together as a school as a whole.
- **Assessment**
Assessment is an active and ongoing conversation about each child in our school. It is shared and explored through stories, observations, documentation and portfolios. We also meet with parents individually to dialogue about their child as we think about the cognitive and social emotional growth of each child.

“All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity; they have interest in relationship, in constructing their own learning, and in negotiating with everything the environment brings to them. Children should be considered as active citizens with rights, as contributing members, with their families, of their local community.”

Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia approach

Organization of School



The SJCC Early Childhood School serves 207 children ages 3 months through Kindergarten divided into 16 classrooms. Most of our classrooms run from 7:30am-6:00pm while we have a small number of classrooms that operate on a shorter day. Most of our classrooms have three co-teachers who are all present in the classroom for the majority of the school day. The exceptions to this are our part time classrooms and our kindergarten which have two co-teachers that are present for all classroom hours. In all of our co-teaching models, our teachers work together bringing diverse perspectives to create a well-rounded nurturing, inspiring, and creative environment for our children to thrive. We have a Leadership Team that consists of a Director, Assistant Director, Pedagogical Coordinator, Education Coordinator, Clinician, and an Administrative Assistant.

Collegiality

The presence of our three teacher model and co-teaching teams in our classrooms stems from our desire to work, plan, and dialogue within a team of teachers and our leadership team. This collaborative way of working is an intentional and integral part of our school.

The School Day

In our school we have full time classrooms and part time classrooms. Our full time classrooms are open from 7:30am to 6:00pm and families can pick up their children any time in the afternoon. Our part time programs run different hours of the day depending on the program choice.

Work Schedule

Teachers in our school work between 16-40 hours each week. Each full time class has 2 hours of designated team planning time each week as well as flexible planning time. Flexible planning time is taken when one teacher from the team of three plans to step out of direct service with the children in order to work on a project, portfolio, or other piece of documentation. The teachers have the autonomy to organize their schedules as well as planning time.

School Calendar

The school year starts at the beginning of September and finishes in the middle of June. Many of our classrooms extend into the summer with a break at the end of August for teachers to organize and prepare for the new school year.

The Atelier & The Mini-Atelier

The SJCC Early Childhood School has two large atelier spaces as well as a mini-atelier in each classroom. Our large atelier spaces are organized by a teacher who has a special passion for the arts and for thinking about long term project work with young children. These are spaces for children to explore a diverse array of media as well as spaces to retrieve nontraditional natural and recycled materials for the classroom. These spaces are organized to inspire the creative minds of children and teachers to invent and learn.

Professional Development

There is a strong value placed on the professional development of the teacher as an individual as well as the teaching community as a whole. As a result, professional development takes on many different forms. Each week the teachers in each age group meet together to discuss any topics they may choose related to their common experience in the school. The Education Coordinator, whose role is to support the staff, also takes part in these meetings. Teaching Teams also spend time alone each week thinking and dialoguing about the experience in their classroom.

The school also organizes multiple professional development meeting times throughout the year when teachers gather either after school hours or the school closes for the occasion. These are times when all teachers meet together.

The school sets aside money each year to invest in high quality professional development opportunities for teachers locally, nationally, and internationally. Teachers apply for the opportunity to study through the school. Once a teacher is accepted for a professional development opportunity, the school pays for the tuition, lodging, and per diem for the conference.

The Physical Environment: The Community Center

Founded in 1949, the Stroum JCC is dedicated to the enrichment of life for the Jewish and general community in the greater Seattle area. Membership is open to everyone. The SJCC offers diverse programming which includes community-wide events, a premier Early Childhood School, Parenting Center, summer day camp, school's out program, before- and after-school care, kids and adult sports leagues, activities specifically for adults and seniors, and a variety of social, cultural and recreational programs.

Examples of community-wide events include our annual Hanukkah celebration, Purim Carnival, Sukkot celebration and Second Night Passover Seder.

The SJCC has served the Jewish and general community since 1968. This location includes a fitness center, racquetball courts, indoor running track, gymnasium and indoor swimming pool. This location also has an auditorium, a children's library, kitchen, classrooms, and meeting rooms. More than 10,000 people pass through the doors of the SJCC.

Each quarter, the SJCC offers programs ranging from swimming lessons to parenting lectures and yoga classes. The J offers transportation to and from several Mercer Island and east side elementary schools for its before- and after-school program. Summer camps include arts, sports, drama, teen adventure, and traditional Jewish day camps with transportation available. Our auditorium, rooms and kitchen are available for rental groups, including birthday parties.

The School

Each year and more than 200 children are enrolled in its infant, toddler, preschool, and kindergarten programs in our school. The school is divided into 16 classrooms: 2 infant rooms, 2 one year old rooms, 2 full time two year old rooms, 2 part time two year old rooms, 4 three year old rooms (mixed full day and part day), 3 four year old rooms (mixed full day and part day), and 1 kindergarten classroom.

The entire school is situated on one floor and is divided into different wings. We organize our classrooms into pods so that the classrooms of the same age groups are physically connected to support the idea of collaboration within the community. The hallways display documentation from the current school year as well as stories from our past.

Our infant and one year old classrooms have different physical make-ups than those of our older classrooms. The infant and one year old classrooms have large carpeted spaces with areas for climbing, invitations for social games such as peek-a-boo, and space for teachers or parents to sit with one or two child and share a quiet moment.

Each of our older classrooms is divided into two or three adjacent spaces used for different activities where the children can work in small or large groups, with or without teachers. The design of all of our classrooms is simple, functional, welcoming, and inspired by the natural world.

Participation

We value a strong and comprehensive partnership with our parents. The ECS Parent Committee is a parent-run volunteer committee. The role of the Parent Committee is to work collaboratively with each other, the Leadership Team, Faculty, and SJCC Professional Team to provide a community where families and children thrive.

The parent committee is made up of 6 sub committees:

Mitzvah Committee

This committee organizes activities and events that inspire connections and belonging within our shared ECS parent community. The Mitzvah Committee also organizes events that contribute to the well-being of both ECS families and the broader Jewish community.

Teacher Appreciation Committee

This committee plans and organizes events during the year to show our appreciation to the ECS faculty.

Events Committee

This committee supports the overall planning and organization of school events and works closely with the co-chairs of each specific event.

Events include:

- SJCC Annual ECS Celebration
- Pancake Breakfast
- Family Havdallah
- Dor L'Dor Day
- Gardening Day
- Truck Day
- Pre Pre-K Completion Ceremony
- Kindergarten Completion Ceremony

Outreach Committee

This committee works together with the Parent Committee and ECS Leadership Team to build community through outreach to new and existing families.

Room Parent Coordinators and Room Parents

Sustainability Committee

This committee will work together with the ECS Leadership Team, teachers and families as well as the broader SJCC community to heighten awareness and emphasize the importance of sustainability and to help facilitate a simple, clear understanding of Tikkun Olam and what it means to "take care of the earth".

Values

SJCC Early Childhood School shares a set of values that guide us on our journey of growth as a school. These values help us to remain focused on what is most important.

Empathy Community

Relationships
Identity
Reflection
Inquiry
Wonder