

# Allen Creek Preschool

## Parent Handbook

### Table of Contents

#### **Section Page**

- I. Introduction
  - a. Mission 3
  - b. History 3
  - c. Educational Philosophy: What's Unique 3
  - d. Relationships with Children at Allen Creek 5
    - i. Positive Interaction Techniques 5
    - ii. Focus on Child Strengths 5
    - iii. Forming Authentic Relationships 5
    - iv. Support of Children's Play 6
    - v. Problem-Solving Approach to Conflict 6
    - vi. Respect and Predictability 6
    - vii. Indoor and Outdoor Play Rules 6
- II. Communication
  - a. Teachers 7
  - b. Family Consultants 8
  - c. Administrative Team 9
  - d. Board of Directors 10
  - e. Parent Council 10
- III. Getting Started
  - a. Paperwork 10
  - b. The First Week for Junior and Senior Preschool 11
  - c. Parent Waiting Room 11
- IV. Procedures
  - a. Absences 12
  - b. Illness 12
  - c. Clothing 13
  - d. Snack 13
  - e. Toys from Home 14
  - f. Classroom Visitors 14
  - g. Class Involvement 15
  - h. Picking Up from School 15
  - i. Parking and Playground 15
  - j. School Closings 16
  - k. Fire and Severe Weather Drills 16

V. Policies

- a. Diversity 16
- b. Immunizations 16
- c. Tuition 17
- d. School Records 17
- e. Disenrollment 17
- f. Program Evaluation 17

## **Section I. Introduction**

### *Allen Creek's Mission*

The mission of Allen Creek Preschool is to support the healthy development of children from birth to age six. We do this by integrating early childhood education with modern psychoanalytic knowledge to benefit children, their parents, and the greater community.

### *History*

Allen Creek Preschool was founded in 1994 by a group of psychoanalysts, educators and community leaders interested in promoting the healthy development of families. Allen Creek ran the Parent-Toddler program for one year in St. Andrew's Episcopal Church before moving to its own facility on Miller Avenue in September of 1997. Our Junior Preschool class was added in 1998, with our Senior Preschool class opening in 1999, and the Fives in 2007.

Allen Creek's current programs include a Parent-Infant class; Parent-Toddler programs; Junior, Senior and Mixed-age Preschool; Allen Creek Fives; and summer camps. All of our programs have an integrated Creative Arts curriculum offered by a Creative Arts specialist.

Allen Creek has served over 150 early childhood providers through our Early Childhood Training Initiative (ECTI), and supports various other outreach projects.

### *Educational Philosophy: What's Unique about Allen Creek*

#### **Our Model**

The experience of Allen Creek Preschool for children, families, staff, and our community is based upon a carefully thought out, researched, and articulated model of child development that focuses on the whole child within the family. In this modern psychoanalytic model, we strive to understand each child as an individual.

- We are thoughtful with the children and their parents about the meanings of their behavior.

- We respect and support their inner selves as they grow from infants into schoolchildren who are sturdy, resilient, and ready to enjoy all kinds of learning.
- Our highly trained, experienced, and renowned interdisciplinary staff of teachers, administrators, and mental health professionals works closely together with parents to support them in these important early childhood years.
- We are thoughtful about creating a safe, predictable, and aesthetically pleasing environment that is enriching and expanding for children to support their emotional, intellectual, physical, and social growth without being overstimulating.
- Our work with children, families, and the larger community is relationship-based, as we believe that strong relationships provide the best context for sturdy development.
- It is important to us that our in-house programs represent a diverse population, and we strive to support each family's development within the values they set out for themselves.

#### Intentional Parenting<sup>©</sup>

Ours is an active stance toward parenting, empowering parents to be the kinds of parents they want to be.

- We help parents articulate their own values in child rearing and move toward actualizing these values, so they can develop a sense of agency and joy in raising their children. We do this in daily informal contacts between parents and teachers, in school-wide activities like Family Art Nights and Community Meals, and through our Family Consultant Program.
- Parents meet two evenings each month with the other parents of children in their classroom and their two classroom Family Consultants for facilitated and informed discussion of child development questions and issues.
- Another forum we have for supporting "Intentional Parenting" is a series of evening discussions open to the public in which various topics of child development are thought about across different ages.

#### Our Community

Allen Creek Preschool is a community. Parents involve themselves in our school in both receiving and giving ways. Parents support what goes on in

their children's classrooms, think with us and each other about parenting, and volunteer in small and larger ways, serving on the Allen Creek Parent Council and other committees. All of us—children, parents, staff, volunteers—learn about ourselves and each other at Allen Creek in challenging and enriching ways.

#### Our International Context

Allen Creek Preschool is a founding member of the Association for Psychoanalytic Schools (APS), a non-profit consortium of schools around the country and abroad sharing our philosophy and model. We are accredited by the APS. It is exciting to mentor new schools with significant parent involvement, applying this broad and deep understanding of child development to educational settings. Allen Creek Preschool has won two national awards for our innovative approach to excellence in preschool education.

#### *Relationships with Children at Allen Creek*

##### Positive Interaction Techniques

The staff at Allen Creek is committed to positive interactions with individual children and within each class group. We greet children as they arrive and work with parents to facilitate a successful separation. During our conversations with children we maintain eye contact, listen carefully, and move close, rather than speaking from a distance. We respect their personal space, and encourage each child to be independent and creative.

##### Focus on Child Strengths

We believe that children learn best from a position of strength, and that they are highly motivated by personal goals and interests. We understand children by observing them at play. Over time we learn a great deal about their unique qualities. These observations are documented in daily anecdotes, giving us a record of the child's development over the course of a year. We use this information to help us create curriculum based directly on children's interests and abilities.

##### Forming Authentic Relationships

Our belief that the teaching/learning process is social and interactive guides our relationships with children in the classroom. Authentic relationships

encourage children to know that there will be times for them to be heard, do things on their own, consider the needs of others, and take initiative and pride in their work. We engage in genuine conversations with children, with specific comments about their work and questions that we honestly need to ask to gather information. Class environments and routines are designed so children have many opportunities to be aware of others, to watch and imitate, to focus on things that have meaning to them, and to discuss and reflect on their actions.

#### Support of Children's Play

We believe that children learn through their play, motivated by curiosity about the world around them. Playing as a partner with children in thoughtful and respectful ways is a hallmark of our interactions with children. We do not tease, belittle, tickle, or use other forms of physical aggression in our interactions with your children.

#### Problem-Solving Approach to Conflict

Social conflict is seen as an opportunity to give children repeated instruction and practice in developing the skills they need to get along with others in the world. We focus on teaching children to resolve their differences with others in cooperative and constructive ways. Teachers facilitate conflict resolution by remaining calm, acknowledging and labeling feelings, gathering information, restating the problem, and offering or asking for solutions. Through this process children make a habit of solving problems, and gain the confidence to do so in future situations.

#### Respect and Predictability

We teach children to take ownership and responsibility for their classroom environment by ensuring safety, predictability and consistency. This includes letting children know in advance as much as possible of any changes (for instance, visitors, absences, upcoming holidays, and so on).

#### Indoor and Outdoor Play Rules

\*Adults treat children with kindness and respect at all times and help children do the same with others.

\*Adults stop any behaviors that are physically harmful or emotionally upsetting.

\*The games children create on their own, and those introduced by adults,

are discussed in staff meetings as they relate to acceptable levels of stimulation.

\*Adults closely monitor individual children's reactions to games and activities and engage them in conversations about their feelings.

\*There is a minimum of 'set in stone' rules (for example, "We only slide down the slide on our bottoms.")

Instead...

\*We give children information as we observe potential problems ("If you climb up the slide now you could collide with John who is getting ready to come down").

\*We ask them for suggestions on how to keep things safe. ("I know you want to run around and kick balls. Let's find a place where you can do that without disturbing or hurting children playing in the sandbox.")

\*We help them to stop if something is too noisy or scary, or dangerous to self or others.

## **Section II. Communication**

We look forward to working and growing with you and your child. Here are some guidelines for communicating with the various components of our school.

### *Teachers*

Your child's teachers are here to foster your child's growth—emotionally, socially, and intellectually. When talking with teachers:

In the morning, **please let us know** briefly about significant events that may help us understand your child's mood and behavior at the start of the day. The more teachers know, the better they can teach your child. It is helpful for parents to tell us about things like family visits, parents' absences or trips, family or friends' illness, new pets or pets' illness or death, exciting family events, particular stress at home from work deadlines or school exams, and so forth.

Please hold off on other or lengthy discussion until after school or in the evenings. Teachers are very busy first thing in the morning and will be

focusing on making your child's transition into the classroom a smooth one. We try to include children in our conversations and not "talk over their heads," or assume that they are not listening. Please make alternative arrangements to talk with the teacher at another time when the topic is not appropriate for your child or other children to hear.

At orientation, you will receive additional contact information for your particular classroom teachers.

Teachers communicate regularly with parents about class events, current projects and the like. Classroom newsletters will be published a few times during the year.

Parent conferences are an important time to discuss your child's growth with his/her teachers and family consultants. We encourage both parents to attend both conferences during the year.

Questions/concerns/kudos regarding the classroom should be addressed first with teachers. If necessary, the next person to speak with would be the Head teacher (Michelle Graves)

### *Family Consultants*

Family Consultants are volunteer child development specialists—psychoanalysts, psychologists, and social workers—who act as unique resources to Allen Creek families. Through weekly observations in the classroom, discussion with teachers, staff meetings, conferences, and twice-monthly evening meetings with you, your family consultants are here to support teachers and parents in understanding your child's growth. Through these meetings, information, insights, and questions brought by parents can be linked with the observations, knowledge, and understanding of the consultants, teachers, and other parents.

Meetings with your Family Consultants are an integral part of the Allen Creek program.

**At least one parent is required to participate in the group meetings, held the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month.** The support and expertise of the Family Consultants are what make Allen Creek unique among preschools.

Questions/Concerns/Kudos relevant to family consultants should be addressed first with your classroom family consultants. If necessary, the

next person to speak with would be the Child Development Director (Michael Singer).

Family Consultants support families in the following ways:

a) *Evening Meetings.* The parent group is made up of the parents of a particular class. These meetings take place at school on the first and third Wednesdays when school is in session from 8:00-9:15pm. Please check your school calendar for actual dates.

b) *Classroom Observations.* Family consultants observe in their assigned classroom at a regular time weekly. Family consultants begin observations the second week of class to give children time to get settled into the classroom routine.

c) *Parent Conferences.* Family consultants make an effort to attend both parent conferences during the year. Occasionally additional team meetings around an individual situation may be called.

d) *Consultations.* Family consultants of a particular classroom are available to parents for three or four individual consultations as needed.

e) *Classroom weekly team meetings.* Family consultant and teacher teams meet weekly.

f) *Weekly Staff meetings.* All family consultants and teachers attend full staff meetings weekly.

### *Administrative Team*

Allen Creek's Administrative Team is made up of the Head Teacher (Michelle Graves) and the Child Development Director (Michael Singer). The Administrative Team supervises the Faculty, Staff and the Family Consultants; manages the school facility; coordinates all events; communicates with parents; and works with the Board of Directors in managing the organization. Our Administrators (Alana Ryan and Teresa Schwarz-Helleis) support the work of the Admin team and manage the school office and records.

Notices from the Administrative Team will be put in your mail pocket (outside each classroom) and also sent to you via email.

Our email address is **allencreekpreschool@yahoo.com**.

Calendar events and other information of interest to parents will be displayed on our website and a bulletin board in the hall, and there will be weekly updates with school news and important reminders by email with paper copies also available.

The Administrative Team welcomes your questions.

Don't hesitate to contact us with questions.

### *Board of Directors*

Allen Creek's Board of Directors meets on the second Monday of every other month at 7:30 pm. A Parent Council Liaison is invited to attend Board meetings. Executive summaries of Board meetings will be available in the office upon request.

### *Parent Council*

The Allen Creek Parent Council works throughout the year to support parents and teachers through various projects and fundraisers. In past years, projects have included book sales, a room parent program, our Dining for Kids dinner and silent auction in May, and an appreciation luncheon for staff. Meetings are held at 7pm on the 3rd Wednesday evening each month. Check the school calendar on the website for specific dates. Come join us!

## **Section III. Getting Started**

### *Paperwork*

Please fill out all forms and return them as soon as possible. **According to State of Michigan licensing regulations children cannot legally start school without a health appraisal and an emergency card on file in the office.**

*The First Week for Junior, Mixed Age, and Senior Preschool and Allen Creek*

## *Fives*

Allen Creek aims to make the transition from home to school a successful one. Each parent-child pair is different and separates at his or her own pace. Some children take more time to separate, others less. Specific plans for each class during the first week of school will be discussed at parent orientation.

## *Parent Waiting Room*

The parent waiting room is for parents when they want to be available for their children in the building. Please resist the urge to look through the windows into your child's classroom or playground space, as this can be disruptive to your child or others in the class. When your child communicates a need to check in with you we will bring him/her to you. We also welcome toddler parents with babies to use this space for their baby and a caregiver while in class with their toddler.

## Section IV. Procedures

### *Absences*

**Let us know** (734-994-3382) when your child will be late or absent for any reason so that teachers can take that into account and let the other children know. If you are taking vacations or trips while school is in session, please notify teachers and administrators as far in advance as possible.

### *Illness*

A child should not come to school when ill and unable to benefit from the day. This is also important to prevent further infection. It is often difficult to tell how ill a small child is, especially before s/he can tell you in words what s/he is feeling. Some guidelines to consider when deciding whether to keep your child home include:

A child with a fever (101° or higher) should stay home for 24 hours after the fever has subsided.

Typical symptoms of illness are: sudden onset of rash or skin eruptions, yellow or greenish drainage from the nose (allergic discharge is clear and may persist), wet or hacking cough, vomiting or diarrhea, excessive or unusual tiredness, inexplicable change from child's normal "feeling good" level of energy or mood.

If a child seems too sick to participate in ordinary routines, check with your pediatrician before school attendance is resumed.

Health regulations require that communicable diseases and conditions, such as strep throat, conjunctivitis, lice, etc., must be reported to the school so that other parents may be notified.

Medication sent to school must be accompanied by a physician's note. All medication must remain in the original container bearing a label showing prescription number, name of medication, date filled, physician's and child's names, and directions for dosage. Epi- pens should be kept up-to-date.

Please inform the school before the start of the year of any allergies or special medical needs. (Please also see the section on snacks.)

Your child's teacher will report all accidents or changes in your child's health. If your child has any injury to head or face, you will be notified immediately so that you may decide whether to come to school.

If an illness or emergency arises at school, we will contact you and ask that you pick up your child promptly. A staff member will stay with your child until your child is picked up.

If your child seems very ill and we are unable to contact you or others you have listed for an emergency, we will call your pediatrician. In a serious emergency we will call emergency services. Should emergency procedures be necessary, a staff member will remain with your child until you or a designated substitute arrives.

***It is extremely important for your child's safety to update the school with any changes in your phone number, emergency numbers, and other pertinent information.***

### *Clothing*

On the first day of school please bring a complete change of washable clothes (including socks and underwear) labeled with your child's name in a large Ziploc bag. Please remember to replace soiled clothing and update both seasonally and for growth.

Clothing suitable for outdoor play is needed each day, even in winter. We play outside unless the weather is severe, it is raining too hard, or it is below 20 degrees (including wind chill).

Art projects and outdoor play will sometimes result in soiled or wet clothing. Please send your child to school in clothes that are all right to get dirty.

### *Snack*

Every day children are offered a nutritious snack. Special dietary needs will be accommodated according to the instructions of the child's parents and physician. Each class offers families opportunities to contribute snacks.

Allen Creek provides an allergen-free environment to meet the health needs of our families. A list of excluded foods is posted on our front door. Details of any specific allergy concerns in your child's class will be discussed at parent orientation before school starts. Lunch guidelines for the Fives class will be detailed with Fives Orientation materials.

Parents are invited to contribute vegetables and fruits for snack time—sign up sheets are posted outside the classrooms. For birthdays or other special occasions, please discuss plans with your child's teacher in advance.

### *Toys from Home*

A child who is carrying and protecting ownership of his or her own toy is not available to use the classroom environment to its fullest. Therefore, we ask parents to help children leave home toys behind, in the car, or in their cubby. If your child depends on a special object to help with transitions, please discuss how to handle it with your child's teacher. Violent toys, such as guns or other similar weapons, are never permitted. Whenever possible we avoid commercial and media tie-ins.

### *Classroom Visitors*

Occasionally, there may be visitors in your child's classroom at specified times with advance notice and preparation. Visitors may include parents, prospective parents, relatives, visiting professionals, potential donors, new Board members, and invited guests with special skills. A staff member familiar to the children in the classroom always accompanies a visitor.

Regular volunteers are interviewed and screened before joining a class at regularly scheduled times, so children can anticipate and plan for their participation. We will let you know if there will be volunteers in your child's class.

### *Class Involvement*

We encourage parents to be involved in their child's education. Allen Creek supports planned parent participation in class activities. Please see your child's teacher if you have special skills or interests you would like to share.

We invite parents to contribute or gather learning materials for use in classes and the creative arts program. Teachers welcome help from parents in documenting projects and creating individual and group portfolios, as well as creating displays of work in the school or in the larger community. Our curriculum supports children forming differentiated teacher-child relationships for the present and the future. For this reason, we don't make use of parents as regular helpers in our classrooms.

### *Picking up from School*

For your child's safety, only an authorized adult may pick up your child. **Written authorization (NOT VERBAL) must be provided to the office,** either on the child information card, or in a signed dated note submitted to the office. If we do not have your authorization **in writing**, your child will stay at school with a staff member until an authorized adult arrives. For your child's safety, any authorized person picking up for the first time will be required to show photo ID.

### *Parking and Playground*

We rely upon parents to ensure children's safety in the parking lot at all times. Parents are asked to bring their children into the classroom each day and to come into school at pick-up time. It is not safe to leave younger children unattended in the car in the parking lot, even briefly. Children may not leave the building unless accompanied by an authorized adult. For safety, please do not allow your child to play in the shrubbery along the sidewalk. Children may not play in the playground unsupervised.

Our parking lot is small; staggered class times allow for everyone to drop off and pick up when parents exit promptly - we appreciate your help in doing so. Overflow parking is always available around the corner at the Korean United Methodist Church on Franklin Street.

### *School Closings*

#### **Allen Creek closes when the Ann Arbor Public Schools are closed.**

School cancellations are announced on radio, television, or the Internet. Listen to "Ann Arbor Public Schools". We will also put a closing message on the Allen Creek answering machine whenever possible. If Allen Creek has to close at any other time (for example, power or water failure), we will notify you immediately by phone and wait with your child until you can come. If tornado or severe storm warnings occur during the school day, teachers are trained to protect children inside the building. We will notify you as soon as we are able.

### *Fire and Severe Weather Drills*

Allen Creek conducts fire and severe weather drills at intervals throughout the year. You will be notified in advance.

## **Section V. Policies**

### *Diversity*

Allen Creek welcomes children from all ethnic, racial, religious, and national backgrounds and diverse family structures. Our school is accessible to children and adults.

### *Immunizations*

Allen Creek will accept waivers of immunizations with the understanding that un-immunized children may be asked to be kept out of school during disease outbreaks in keeping with guidelines set by the Washtenaw County Department of Public Health and the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

### *Tuition*

Tuition is divided into 10 monthly installments, with the first installment due on June 1 for the coming school year, and subsequent payments due the first of each month from September through May. Allen Creek will charge a \$25 fee for each late tuition payment and any check returned for insufficient funds.

### *School Records*

Allen Creek maintains a record of developmental progress for each child. Parents have access to their own child's file at all times. Teachers, administrators and family consultants have access to student files. Student records are kept confidential at all times. Student files are only made available outside the school with a release form signed by a parent.

### *Disenrollment*

On rare occasions, Allen Creek may find that our program is not meeting the needs of a particular child. In those instances, Allen Creek reserves the right to ask a family to leave the school. This extreme step is not taken without specific documentation of our stated concerns and team meetings to discuss them with parents. Whenever possible, Allen Creek suggests options for alternative placements.

### *Program Evaluation*

At Allen Creek we want to understand in quantitative and qualitative ways how effective our school is in helping children and parents in their development. To improve Allen Creek's programs, we need to find out what works, what lasts, what matters - to each group in the school. Our service-driven research is designed to benefit all members of the Allen Creek community. We do not make our students or their families available as subjects for research conducted by professionals outside Allen Creek.

Parents are asked twice a year to anonymously fill out a program survey online. Teachers fill out Devereux Early Childhood Assessments at the

beginning and end of the year.

**We make every effort to respect and protect the privacy of families by grouping data, collecting information anonymously, and using numbers rather than names, whenever possible.** Allen Creek plays a significant role in spreading understanding of the importance of early relationships to others who work with children locally, nationally and internationally. Professional presentations by Allen Creek researchers protect privacy by disguising vignettes. Conference attendees are always instructed to respect confidentiality.

We are a small school and many classes have both parents and children in attendance. Therefore no write-ups containing vignettes or observations that might be recognizable to those concerned, even if disguised, have yet been published. After the passage of some years, papers may be published with appropriate and conventional professional privacy protections.

All evaluation methods are submitted to Allen Creek's Research Advisory Board, acting as a Human Subjects' Review, to monitor these methodological safeguards.

Over the years there have been several different projects, including a day description, initially made by individual family consultants, later by parents; a twice-yearly program evaluation survey; twice-yearly developmental checklists for children filled out by teachers. Plans are being made for a long-term impact study that follows the later development of Allen Creek families, now that we have alumni moving through later levels of school. We have begun qualitative research on different aspects of parenting by occasionally choosing an annual topic for study. Topics in past years have included separation, sleep and parents' worries. We communicate about the research and our findings -- to parents through the Newsletter; to teachers and to family consultants at meetings and through professional presentations.

Any questions or concerns about Allen Creek research may be addressed to Jack Novick, Ph.D, a Family Consultant, who is Chair of Allen Creek's Research Committee.



