



# THE EARLY SCHOOL

## CO-EDUCATIONAL, TWO THROUGH FIVE YEARS OF AGE

The Ashley Hall approach to early childhood education is rooted in constructivist theory of education and inspired by Reggio Emilia. We emphasize experiential learning and critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity through a variety of student-led opportunities. Children learn through joyful play, a teaching method which is supported by a century of research. All Early School lead teachers have either earned master's degrees in an applicable field or are current master's degree candidates. Associate teachers have four-year degrees or over ten years of experience in the field. While using an approach that honors each child's developmental timeline, our teachers have developed a teaching philosophy that fosters all areas of growth and personal connections. Children are introduced to concepts in math, science, literacy, and art while engaged in an academic curriculum that is centered around the child's own interests which are expressed through inquiry-based questions. This core academic curriculum is supplemented with daily instruction in French and regular lessons in swimming, art, literacy, and music.

By asking inquiry-based questions or introducing new tools relevant to the students' activity which we call invitations and provocations, a child's learning is advanced through the parameters of play. These concepts form the foundation of early childhood school learning and include the following: patterns' cause and effect; scale proportion and quantity' systems and models; structure and function; energy and matter; and stability and change.

# REGGIO EMILIA *Inspiration*

In the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy, a constructivist approach to early childhood education was developed more than 50 years ago. Since, it has been embraced worldwide because of its strong, child-directed learning model. The framework focuses on nurturing children within a community and through interactions with peers, teachers, and parents. An engaging school environment is a vital component and is often referred to as the “third teacher.” Classrooms promote exploratory learning and creativity and provocations for explorations are a hallmark of the approach.

The guiding philosophy behind Reggio Emilia is that children are valued as curious, intelligent, creative, and resourceful learners who have a natural desire to interact and communicate with others. Teachers cultivate their students’ learning through serving as the facilitator. As the children actively explore their environment and topics of interest, teachers incorporate cognitive, language, social, emotional, and fine and gross motor skills into their play and learning. As a result, Reggio Emilia classrooms are joyful, purposeful, and active.

## KEY FEATURES *of our* APPROACH

- ★ Teachers are active learners and facilitators. They encourage the development of community in their classrooms and guide the learning process. Teachers listen, interact, observe, and document children’s work. They help children to question and evaluate by encouraging critical thinking and independent inquiry.
- ★ Home-school relationships are vital to children’s healthy growth and development. Teachers communicate regularly with parents, and our program is family centered. Ashley Hall’s parent communications portal, the Learning Commons, offers a central source of school information and individual class pages for each teacher. Individual emails, parent conferences and home visits are other sources of communications.
- ★ The arts are a powerful component. It is a symbolic language through which children can communicate and express their comprehension of investigations.
- ★ The documentation of children’s work is essential as a learning tool. Children express, articulate, and formulate their ideas and understandings through this process. Documentation includes pictures, narratives, artwork, and graphic representations of the learning process.
- ★ Explorations are child-centered and can be long or short-term. Children are encouraged to follow their interests, and teachers guide students in making decisions about the direction of an investigation, ways for the classroom community to work together, and media for representing their learning.
- ★ The school environment is a major contributor to the learning process; therefore, the classrooms are rich in possibilities and spur the creative thinking processes for children. Common spaces encourage growth of community so that children from different classrooms can work together and share insights. The welcoming environment is an expression of respect for each child. In addition, the classroom environments are set up for children to explore investigations as children flow to areas of activity to work according to their interests and skill levels. Investigations for math, literacy, daily living, sensory exploration, science, art, and dramatic play are also found in each classroom.





# THE EARLY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

## LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are the core of literacy. Books (story books, non-fiction or poetry) are read to children each day at group time and one-on-one throughout the day both inside and outside. Children have flannel board stories to retell favorites or create their own. Children make individual or class books to document experiences and celebrate the imagination. We provide children with opportunities for meaningful conversations with us and each other throughout the day. Through dramatic play, table-top games, group-time activities and casual conversations with teachers and each other, there are many opportunities for children to gain emergent reading and writing with meaningful experiences daily. All children are exposed to letters, phonetics, and the process of reading and writing in both individual and small groups.

## SCIENCE

The indoor and outdoor classroom provides a rich opportunity for the young scientist. Through time spent in nature (observing and tending plants in our garden, the tadpoles in the reflection pond, and insects), activities with earth (sand and dirt), wind and water, watching weather, making bubbles, cooking and watching transformations of matter, science instruction encourages inquiry, exploration, and observation and provides time for experimentation. Science is incorporated in numerous ways throughout the early education program, from full-day field trips to our campus on Johns Island, which we lovingly call The Nature Retreat, to the exploration of Ashley Hall, and through daily materials investigated in our classrooms as provocations. Our students are naturally curious about the environment around them, and it is our goal to embrace this curiosity and foster a love for the sciences.

## MATH

Math is everywhere—inside and outside. Children love to count and compare things. Through blocks, science and nature activities, dramatic play, art, music, and movement, the children will build foundation skills in arithmetic, geometry, and algebra. The Early School math program is wide-ranging, including the study of numeration, problem-solving, probability, linear counting, gradation, geometry, and patterns through the use of manipulative materials and age-appropriate activities. Hands-on math materials allow our students to begin with concrete concepts and move toward more abstract thinking.

## THE EARLY SCHOOL CURRICULUM *(CONTINUED)*

### FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Because young children learn a second language best through conversation, our students are introduced to French through a modified immersion technique. This conversational approach develops our students' auditory comprehension and social skills through dialogue. All of our students have daily exposure to conversational French, an investment that serves as a foundation for future language education and cultural experiences.

### SWIMMING

Swimming abilities are principal life skills. Because of this, our students have weekly swimming instruction in our year-round swimming program. Our students learn to develop a love of the water and are able to build confidence in their swimming abilities as they work with our certified swim instructors to enhance their skills.

### ATELIER STUDIO

We offer creative art experiences for children each day in the classroom and in the atelier, a special studio place where children are exposed to a wide variety of creative materials. In the atelier, children are free to explore clay, paint, wire, pastels, sculpture, chalk, crayons, pencils, pastels, paper, fabric, yarn, wood and recycled materials, and digital drawing, as well as experiment with sound and dramatic play to express their unique ideas about the world. The studio is guided by the atelierista, an educator with a background in the arts, who also spends time in the classrooms working with the children and teachers.

### MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

Children are naturally drawn to music and movement, and the studio is the perfect place to cultivate that love. Each week, students sing, play instruments, and engage in creative movement that builds strength and coordination. Family events provide many opportunities to showcase student work. We love to offer our spaces a catalyst for dramatic expression. Children don't need much encouragement to pretend and engage in dramatic play. It is second nature to them. They'll create it in the playhouse (in or outside) in the sandbox, with unit blocks and animals and people inside, with the hollow blocks and hard hats outside, on bikes, in the garden... everywhere!

### FINE AND GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

Fine and gross motor activities take place each day both inside and outside. Perceptual motor skills are set up each day in the outdoor classroom for experiences that stimulate the body systems to gain strength, balance, and coordination. Activities are planned to meet children's needs based on observations, collaboration with classroom teachers, and developmental assessments. Actions such as using eye droppers and squeeze bottles to water plants, manipulating art materials to create a masterpiece, pouring and measuring for cooking activities, and playing with playhouse people are the foundation skills that build strength in muscles used for writing.

### SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the everyday social and emotional support the students receive from their teachers, we seek to instill empathy, emotional management, problem solving, self-regulation, and executive function skills. Kindergarten teachers nation-wide say that self-regulation is critical for early school success. Through building trust, interacting with peers and teachers, engaging in activities and games with their peers, creating scenarios through dramatic play, and by being part of a group in general, we enhance healthy relationships for our children.