

# Early Childhood at Grace

## Early Childhood educational philosophy at Grace



The preschool, junior and senior kindergarten curriculum at Grace focuses on:

- Developing children's self-awareness, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-concept.
- Developing children's understanding and appreciation for others and awareness of what others have to offer.
- Teaching children *how* to learn, not what to learn.
- Teaching children how to cope with change and with realities.
- Teaching so that children are glad they are alive!

At the heart of the early childhood curriculum lies social play. It calls on the child to use all of his or her capacities. It involves sustained attention, imagination, and innovative ways of perceiving and dealing with reality. It involves creative and scientific thinking. Children at play are learning to deal with the world around them. They are organizing ideas, talking, solving problems, trying new ways, setting tasks for themselves, repeating what works, and challenging themselves. This is the business of childhood!

At all times and in all activities the core of the early childhood curriculum is children themselves. Learning and play are integrated, and subject boundaries are not distinct. Activities are organized around broad, unified themes, encompassing many subjects.

Class	Time	Days
Preschool	8:30 - 11:30 a.m.	M-W-F; T-Th; or M-F
Junior Kindergarten	8:30 - 11:30 a.m.	M-F
Senior Kindergarten	8:30 - 11:30 a.m.	M-F
JK and SK afternoon program	11:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	1 to 5 days per week



## Age three: We grow and grow!

Coming to school is a big step in development for three- to four-year-olds. For many children it is the first opportunity to spend significant time in a structured setting outside the home or the presence of a known caregiver. Grace's preschool program offers children a warm, welcoming environment as they transition into life at school. It's a joy to see children's confidence grow as the year progresses.

Our goal in preschool is to build a community of learners who explore many aspects of life using a variety of learning styles. Children build, touch, count, sing, and converse. There are times for free-choice play, small group activities, whole group listening, eating together, and gross motor play.

Cognitive, physical, social, and spiritual development are all part of the program at Grace. Children refine their abilities in academic areas such as counting, writing, and recognizing letters. They also gain increased motor control and become more independent in self-care activities such as getting dressed and helping with clean-up.

Preschool at Grace also focuses on developing solid social skills and a foundation for future spiritual growth. Children learn how to be a friend and how to make friends. Of even greater importance is learning that God loves and cares for each of us and discovering ways to praise and worship him.

Sandy Schommer, Preschool teacher



## Age four: Junior Kindergarten friends

In junior kindergarten we work on things like letters, science, art, music, counting, patterns, storytelling, and writing, and we also learn how to be good friends, how to solve conflicts, and how to practice good manners. We pray together, and we learn about Jesus and God's unconditional love. There is a lot of singing, and snack and recess, too.

The fifth year of life is an important period of growth—physically, academically, socially and spiritually, so in Grace's junior kindergarten we provide a safe and comfortable Christian environment that enriches children's experience of life, nurtures them, and stimulates minds and spirits. The JK learning environment is full of opportunities for exploration, self-expression, and interaction with peers and teachers. There are places to play and create and to solve problems, and time to just think about things. We show children that the world has meaning, and we strive to instill courage and confidence along with the skills needed to surmount challenges.

The children's and teacher's interests are the inspiration for classroom activities. Each child has the freedom to discover his or her own voice, to make choices, and to be independent, with the teacher's guidance. Most importantly, JK students discover their place in God's creation as one of his beloved children.

Kathy Brooks, Benjamin Chandler  
JK teachers



## Age five: Learning "everything"

Since kindergartners are curious by nature, energetic beyond belief, and eager to learn everything, the senior kindergarten classroom allows for hands-on discovery, free-choice interaction with peers and with the environment, and guided instruction from teachers.

The classroom atmosphere encourages movement, investigation, observation, and interaction between students and teacher. The free-choice activities that begin each day allow the teacher to spend individual time with each child throughout the week. This one-on-one experience allows the teacher to understand the academic and social needs of each child and to adapt the kindergarten program to accommodate children's specific needs and strengths.

Through social interactions, children acquire vital problem-solving skills as they make choices, plan activities, and experience cause-and-effect happenings. Most importantly, senior kindergartners know and learn that they are uniquely created children of God and that Jesus' love for them is constant and never-ending. These are the very skills necessary for life, and we practice them every day in senior kindergarten!

Ellie Schnack, SK teacher