

## WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE LEARNING AND BELONGING PRE-SCHOOL?

**History:** The University of Montana's **Learning And Belonging (LAB) Pre-School** has a rich history of providing early care and education for young children and their families from throughout the Missoula community for more than 60 years.

In 1988, preschool operations were moved to the College of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction where it continues to serve as a model program for UM students. In October 2009 the program moved into the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education and Human Sciences building.



**Mission:** The LAB Pre-School is a multi-age early childhood program that invites young children of all abilities and their families to participate in a caring community designed to promote lifelong learning and the joys of belonging - both in terms of self-acceptance and as a member of a group. This model early childhood program also strives to provide meaningful learning experiences for University of Montana students to enhance their understanding of child development, the significance of family and teacher partnerships, and the teaching and learning process.

## WHAT IS THE LEARNING AND BELONGING PRE-SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY?

At the Learning and Belonging Pre-School, we maintain a small group size in each session that supports our goal of meeting the individual strengths, interests, and needs of every child in the program. The classroom environment and expectations are created with respect for child development and the individuality of children. In order to achieve our goal, we:

- ☆Welcome and value the uniqueness of each child and their family.

- ☆Support each child's active participation in real, meaningful projects designed to allow success and challenge at individual developmental levels.

- ☆Introduce activities and materials that foster development of the whole child in multiple areas including creative arts, language and literacy, mathematics and numeracy, physical development and health, science, social and emotional development, and social studies.

- ☆Offer multiple opportunities for self-selected exploration, social interaction, and problem solving to enhance children's natural motivation to learn.

- ☆Use positive child guidance techniques that teach skills and support children's emerging self-control.

- ☆Respect families as the most important teachers of their children.

## WHAT CURRICULUM APPROACH IS USED?

We value the significance of early learning for children and understand how important quality education is to parents. The LAB Preschool uses knowledge of child growth and development, the latest research, recommendations of early childhood education professional organizations, the Montana Early Learning Standards and Teaching Strategies GOLD to guide our teaching practices. As informed and well-educated teachers, we offer preschool children a stimulating learning environment that supports the development of knowledge, skills, and a love for learning that will prepare for success in kindergarten and beyond.

Core Practices: While there is not a single curriculum that has been identified as “the best” for meeting the early care and education needs of children, the following practices are linked with positive learning outcomes and form the foundation of our curriculum. The LAB Preschool is committed to:

- ☆ Providing a rich, engaging verbal environment.
- ☆ Blending play, authentic learning experiences, and direct instruction so children have multiple opportunities for learning in key areas.
- ☆ Arranging a schedule and routines that are consistent but not overly structured or regimented.
- ☆ Developing meaningful relationships with children and their families

Meaningful Learning: In addition, we recognize the importance of creating meaningful learning experiences for young children. To accomplish this, the teachers introduces projects that give children opportunities to use the skills they are learning to explore real places, objects, and events in the world around them. By using new skills in meaningful ways, we enhance the likelihood that those skills will be mastered. In addition, children become highly engaged in the learning process-learning how to learn and loving it!

Curriculum Content: The content of the LAB Preschool curriculum has been developed in response to what children ages three to five need to know, understand, and be able to do as established by the Montana Early Learning Standards (2013). These standards were developed through the collaborative work of early childhood professionals, public school teachers and principals, and parents. Montana’s Early Learning Standards (MELS) are organized into seven curriculum areas:

**\*Creative Arts \*Language and Literacy \*Mathematics and Numeracy \*Physical Development and Health \*Science \*Social Emotional Development \*Social Studies**

Teaching Strategies GOLD aligns with MELS and is used as a guide to support curriculum planning and assessment. The LAB Preschool curriculum provides children with learning experiences in each of these areas and uses a variety of assessment tools to measure children’s progress.

*The curriculum is integrated so that learning occurs primarily through projects, learning centers, and playful activities that reflect current interests of children. For example, a social studies project such as building and operating a store or science project such as furnishing and caring for an aquarium provide focused opportunities for children to plan, dictate, and/or write their plans (using invented and teacher taught spelling), to draw and write about their activity, to discuss what they are doing, to read nonfiction books for needed information, to work cooperatively with other children, to learn facts in meaningful context, and to enjoy learning. ~Sue Bredekamp. The National Association for the Education of Young Children. <http://www.naeyc.org/>*

Enrollment in each session is limited to 16 children. We are committed to developing a connected community for young children, which is supported by small group size. In addition, all children are enrolled for the full 4-day session. This means that you and your child can anticipate interacting with the same group of children and their families during your participation.



## WHEN IS THE PROGRAM OPEN?

**Operating Schedule:** As a University of Montana program, the program follows the UM calendar and observes all UM holidays and is typically quite similar to the calendar established by the Missoula County Public Schools.

**Preschool Sessions:** A *morning* and an *afternoon* preschool session are offered Monday through Thursday. Fridays are reserved for UM student seminars and program planning. The hours for each preschool session are listed below:

Morning Session	9:00 - 12:00
Afternoon Session	1:00 - 4:00

## HOW ARE CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THE PRESCHOOL?

**Age Requirements:** All children in the greater Missoula community between ages 3 and 5 years are eligible for enrollment.

**Enrollment Process:** Enrollment for the upcoming preschool year (September to mid-May) takes place in four phases and on a first-come, first-served basis.

☆ In February, enrollment for the next year is opened to children currently enrolled and their siblings.

☆ The second enrollment phase is open to siblings of children enrolled in previous years who are on our waiting list.

☆In March the third phase begins and new families who are on the waiting list are contacted according to the date they first contacted us.

☆Finally, remaining enrollment openings are filled according to parent interest.

**Enrollment Deposit:** For your convenience, we have divided the total yearly tuition into 10 payments. The first serves as a **non-refundable deposit** and is required at the time of registration (typically paid during the spring enrollment process) to hold the preschool placement for the following academic year.

Once the enrollment deposit is paid, each family will receive a registration packet with appropriate forms to complete, a Parent Handbook, a current calendar and daily schedule.

### **WHAT ABOUT TUITION AND WHEN DO I PAY?**

**Background Information:** Tuition is charged on an annual basis with 10 payment installments collected according to a monthly schedule.

Our annual tuition based approach allows us to meet daily and monthly expenses, which remain consistent even when your child is absent. This means that the full monthly tuition is always assessed, even when the child has missed school days.

**Tuition Payment Plan:** Tuition is divided into ten equal payments for the school year and are due by the 15th of each month. Payment (in form of cash or check) can be dropped in the locked tuition box, located in the foyer. Credit card payments can be made directly to UM's Business Services.

### **WHAT WILL MY CHILD'S PRESCHOOL DAY BE LIKE?**

**The classroom environment:** The classroom is a large, open space surrounded by windows and doors that lead onto our outside patio area. Materials and furnishings are arranged in learning centers to invite small groups of children to play. Learning centers include block play, art, reading and writing, science and math, dramatic play, and sensory exploration.

**Typical Daily Schedule:** The day is guided by a routine developed to meet the needs of children in the preschool years. Through careful planning, each day offers a balance of large and small group experiences, child and teacher-directed time, and active and quiet activities. While the schedule remains flexible to meet the daily interests and needs of the group, a typical day includes:

**LEARNING CENTERS:** Children choose from a range of play areas presenting opportunities for social interaction, project work, and learning. A nutritious daily snack is offered during center time and gives children an energy boost for a busy day.

**CIRCLE:** A large group meeting time used to build community through sharing, songs, and stories. Project topics and investigations are often introduced through books, discussions, and presentations from visiting experts.

**SMALL GROUP:** Children gather in small groups to complete a teacher-planned activity that often relates to the project topic and introduces social, science, math, and/or literacy concepts using age-appropriate materials and methods.

**OUTDOOR PLAY:** Opportunities to run, jump, and climb are provided on the playground daily.

**Field Trips:** Learning within the university environment is supported by many opportunities to move beyond the walls of the classroom. Children enjoy a spacious playground and opportunities to use campus facilities. All of our field trips are within walking distance. Parents sign a field trip permission slip at the beginning of the school year. When an event is planned, you receive notice of the date, location, and times of the excursion. In addition, teachers will keep you fully informed of any times when children are adventuring outside the classroom on a walk or spontaneous outing.

## **WHAT WILL PARENT INVOLVEMENT BE LIKE FOR ME?**

**Parent/Preschool Partnerships:** As the most significant person in your child's life, you are invited to:

- ★Share your goals, hopes, and dreams for your child with staff who will listen and partner with you.
- ★Know, understand, and discuss with us the program philosophy and goals.
- ★Stop in any time! Our observation room is a perfect place to be able to

watch your child in our classroom without disrupting the natural flow of the day. Please check in with the teacher if you are using the observation room.

★Work with your child's teacher to plan special activities or events based on your family traditions, celebrations, talents, and interests.

★Participate in planned conferences with your child's teacher (fall and spring) to discuss your child's progress in the program.

★Contact your child's teacher to schedule a meeting at any time to share your celebrations and/or concerns about your child.

**Arrival and Departure Routines:** Please plan to allow transition time for your child and to visit with your child's teacher. At arrival and departure, program staff will support you in transitioning your child into the daily routine.

★Sign your child in and out each day on the posted attendance sheet.

★Complete and sign an authorized release permission slip if anyone other than the parent(s) will be picking the child up from our program. We cannot allow a child to leave with anyone other than the parent unless we have signed consent.



**Absence Policy:** When your child will not be attending preschool, please call to report your child's absence before the session begins. When leaving a message, please include the reason for your child's absence and when you expect your child to return to preschool.

## HOW DO YOU GUIDE CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR?

**Guidance Philosophy:** A positive guidance approach is used in our classroom to help children understand limits and to support their emerging self-control skills. Appropriate guidance allows children to value themselves and others and to cultivate respect for each other within a classroom setting.

**Guidance Strategies:** Our guidance approach begins even before children arrive through thoughtful planning of an appropriate environment and placement of materials within the classroom to prevent potential problems. When working with children, our approach to guidance will include the following:

- ☆A focus on developing a positive relationship with each child and family
- ☆Use of strategies that support the development of a positive classroom community characterized by joy and respect for diversity
- ☆Clear, consistent boundaries which are supported with encouragement, practice, and ongoing teaching

- ☆Encouragement of internal self-discipline
- ☆Modeling, as well as teaching, positive behaviors
- ☆Facilitating positive self-esteem by accepting children's feelings
- ☆Modeling problem-solving techniques

**A Positive Approach:** We believe that providing encouragement, offering choices, redirection, limit setting, and joint problem solving are the most effective tools of discipline. The teachers within the classroom assess and decide the most appropriate form of guidance to use with each child in each situation. We do not equate guidance or discipline with punishment. Isolated time-out practices are not utilized in the LAB Preschool program. In addition, physical punishment is never used in our program.

**Parent Involvement:** In some circumstances, teachers may partner with you to problem solve and jointly develop a behavior plan for your child. This will include discussion with you about your child's successes and challenges in the program and information on how you deal with the child's behavior at home. The teacher will strive to incorporate your successful and appropriate guidance strategies into the classroom approach. Likewise, you are encouraged to ask for information from the teachers.

## WHAT DO YOU DO TO KEEP CHILDREN HEALTHY?

### Routine Health and Safety

**Practices:** Prevention is the focus of our health and safety practices. Children are supervised at all times. Effective hand washing is used by teachers and taught to both UM students and children to reduce the spread of illness in the program. A telephone is available in the classroom in case of emergency and family contact information is kept with the phone as well as the number to the poison control center. A well-supplied first-aid kit is kept in the classroom, on the playground and a portable first-aid kit is taken along on field trips.

### Meeting Children's Nutritional Needs:

The curriculum includes learning experiences for the children regarding healthy foods. Parents are encouraged to share diet restrictions with the teachers. It is also essential that information about food allergies is expressed and recorded on the program intake form.

Daily snacks will represent a range of food groups across the week and will provide a natural opportunity for discussion of healthy food choices.

**When Children Are Ill:** Regulations concerning sick children in-group settings are often called Exclusion Policies. For your child's well being and the health of other members of our community, children cannot attend preschool when they are ill. If the Supervising Teacher sees indications of illness at arrival time, the parent will be asked to keep their child at home for the day. In accordance with Montana's childcare licensing regulations, the following

health conditions require special attention:

**a)** Children must be **without** fever of 101F or greater for 24 hours before they return to the child care facility, except that children with immunization-related fevers need not be excluded if they are able to participate in the routine of the child care facility.

**b)** Children must be without vomiting and diarrhea for 24 hours before they return to the childcare facility. Vomiting includes 2 or more episodes in the previous 24 hours. Diarrhea is defined as an increased number of stools, increased water in the stool, and/or decreased form to the stool that cannot be contained by a diaper or clothing.

**c)** Children with any of the bacterial infections listed below must be treated with antibiotics for 24 hours before they return to the childcare center:

- i. Strep throat
- ii. Scarlet fever
- iii. Impetigo
- iv. Bacterial conjunctivitis (pinkeye)
- v. Skin infections such as a draining burn, infected wound, or hangnail

**d)** Generalized rashes, including those covering multiple parts of the body, must be evaluated by a healthcare provider to determine their cause before the child can return to the childcare facility.

**e)** Children with chickenpox may not be admitted to the childcare facility until their sores dry up, which usually takes 5 to 7 days.

**f)** Children who are jaundiced must be excluded until a health care provider evaluates the cause and authorizes the child to return to the childcare facility.

**g)** Children with symptoms of severe illness, such as uncontrolled coughing, breathing difficulty or wheezing, stiff neck, irritability, poor food or fluid intake, or a seizure, must be evaluated by a health care provider before they may return to the child care facility.

### **When Children Become Ill at**

**Preschool:** If a child becomes ill at preschool, the program will follow licensing guidelines by:

a) Contacting the parent immediately. The child must be picked up within 30 minutes of the phone call. If you are unable to pick the child up within 30 minutes, the parent is responsible for contacting another family member or friend who can meet this timeline.

b) Allowing the child to be supervised while resting in the office, away from other children.

c) Reporting each case of suspected communicable disease the same day by telephone to the local health authority, or as soon as possible thereafter if no contact can be made the same day.

State Licensing Requirements mandate that the Supervising teacher monitor the health status of every child upon arrival, throughout the day, and upon re-entry into the classroom following an absence due to illness. As professionals, they are required to make decisions that will protect the health of the overall group of children. Parents will be contacted and required to come

immediately if a child in our care shows any (even one occurrence) of the following symptoms:

- ☆ Fever of 101 or higher,
- ☆ Vomiting
- ☆ Diarrhea
- ☆ Generalized rashes
- ☆ Uncontrolled coughing, or
- ☆ Unusual level of irritability or sleepiness that appears to be related to poor health.

The teachers are required to follow licensing guidelines and will use professional judgment in deciding when a parent will be contacted to take their child home. **As a member of our community, please understand how important it is for every family to take an active role in protecting the health of all children in the group.**

**Emergency Procedures:** The Supervising Teachers maintain current CPR and first-aid training. In the event of any emergency, 911 will be called immediately. Emergency services will be used to transport the child, if necessary. Whenever indicated, the teacher will also call the poison control number (1-800-222-1222).



## **WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE LAB PRESCHOOL STAFF?**

LAB Preschool Staff: The core preschool staff include an **Early Childhood Clinical Specialist (ECCS)** who serves as the director of the program and the supervising teacher of UM's field-experience students. Two **Early Childhood Specialists (ECS)** are the lead teachers. Teachers are supported by a staff of student employees who serve as teacher aides. ECCS and ECS have mastery level early childhood teaching skills and training. The team works together to develop the learning environment and the curriculum and each takes primary responsibility for one of the preschool sessions.



## **HOW ARE UM STUDENTS INCLUDED?**

**UM Students:** The LAB Preschool is a model program established to allow students at The University of Montana the opportunity to enhance their understanding of child development and appropriate education environments for young children. Most of the students completing course work in our

program are enrolled in the Elementary Education Department. Some are acquiring their first professional experience in a school setting while others have identified early childhood as a core interest and are completing a more rigorous clinical experience. As UM requires, students undergo background checks and meet necessary immunization and health requirements.

**Student Supervision:** Preschool operations and teacher schedules have been carefully orchestrated to support the development of a strong teaching team with the student interns. A thorough orientation is completed prior to involvement in the Preschool and students can attend a weekly instructional seminar to enhance their developing knowledge and teaching skills. In addition, the Supervising Teachers meet with the UM students on a daily basis before and after each preschool session to provide ongoing instruction and support. UM students are always supervised in their work with the children, and they bring a great deal of talent and enthusiasm to the daily preschool experience.

The program also employs UM student employees to complete various tasks within the program. These students participate fully in the student orientation and training seminars and are often long-term employees across their years of higher education.

**Building Campus Partnerships:** Strong campus partnerships have emerged over time bringing a range of experiences to the children. Collaboration examples in the past

have included weekly music classes provided by Music Education students, creative dance with students in the School of Fine Arts, and PE classes with students from the Department of Health and Human Performance. While these experiences will vary from one year to the next, the teachers work hard to maintain a range of collaborative partnerships with UM programs that can enhance the preschool experience.



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