

Washington DCJCC Preschool

Frequently Asked Questions

Preschool Mission Statement

It is our intention to foster a nurturing environment of open-ended exploration, curiosity and growth for children, teachers and parents that deepens our connections to Judaism, the community and the world around us.

What is a “Reggio Emilia-inspired curriculum”? What does my child learn from it?

Our educational vision is based upon the emergent curriculum principles of the world-renowned schools for young children in Reggio Emilia, Italy. As a school community, we are committed to values based on an image of children as curious, competent and capable. Our journey begins as our staff asks questions, listens to children, collaborates with them and documents their work. As children discover and explore, they may work on investigations that last a few days to a few months. All projects must be meaningful to them and their world. By creating a classroom environment that allows for open-ended learning and discovery, we give children a chance to build their understanding the world. By providing “scaffolding,” the teachers assist children to become confident in their skills so that they may express themselves in many different symbolic languages—speech, drawing and acting, to name a few. We also believe that learning is a cooperative venture which includes other children, their teachers, their families and our larger community. Literacy, math, social studies, science, music and arts are all emphasized through a framework of hands-on contextualized experiences.

Will my child be ready for Kindergarten?

Yes. Our way of teaching, by having the students learn how to learn, prepares them for success in Kindergarten and beyond. They will build the foundation for literacy, math, science, creative, motor and social skills they will need to do well in later schooling. The difference is that the skills are taught in the context of what is interesting to the children.

In conversations with parents, administrators and staff from the elementary schools, they all report that the children are doing quite well.

LOGISTICS AND PRACTICAL MATTERS

What are your hours of operation?

The Washington DCJCC Preschool is open Monday–Friday, 7:30 am–6:00 pm. Exception: some holidays we close at 3:00 pm; please see your annual school calendar for details.

Does my child need to be here all day? When can I pick up my child?

No. You are welcome to pick your child up early; please discuss any change in plans with your child’s teachers.

Do you offer part-time schedules?

We offer a full-time schedule, with a standard tuition for all students in a class.

Do you run on a 12-month or 9-month calendar? Do I need to pay tuition for the entire year?

We are a twelve-month program and parents are responsible for tuition from the first day of school through August 31st of the school year. Parents who withdraw a child for an extended period of time (e.g. vacation) are still required to pay for those months. All deposits, fees and tuition are non-refundable.

How do we get to the 16th Street J, and where can we park?

The 16th Street J is located at 1529 Sixteenth Street NW, at the corner of 16th and Q. The entrance is on Q Street.

Our closest **Metro** stop is Dupont Circle on the Red Line. The **Metrobus** S1, S2 and S4 stops on 16th Street. The L2 line and 14th Street Lines (52, 53, 54) also stop near the J.

There is a parking lot on the east side of the J on Q Street. Families may use the designated spaces in the lot for drop-off and pick up at the designated times. You may also park in front of the building in the drop-off area for up to fifteen (15) minutes at a time.

Who can pick up my child from school?

For your child's security and your peace of mind, you must give written permission for any individual to pick up your child. You may use the Emergency Contact and Pick-Up Authorization form, email or a written note. If you have not personally introduced us to this person, we will ask for identification.

Does my child need to be toilet-trained?

No. We understand that most two-year olds are not yet toilet trained. When your child is ready, we work closely with the parent and child to toilet train the child in a consistent, calming, encouraging manner. We celebrate success and keep a positive upbeat attitude when the child has an "accident." The parent and school should follow a consistent and similar schedule, or the child's training will be erratic. Your child's teachers will keep you posted on progress—please keep us abreast of all news, for example, when your child comes to Preschool with only underwear on!

For which holidays (Jewish and federal) does the J's Preschool close?

The Preschool will be closed for the following Jewish holidays:

- Rosh Hashanah (two days)
- Yom Kippur (a day and a half)
- Sukkot (two days)
- Shemini Atzeret (one day)
- Simchat Torah (one day)
- Passover (first two and last two days)
- Shavuot (two days)

As you may know, the Hebrew calendar runs on a lunar calendar, which varies from the Roman calendar. Therefore, each year, the Jewish holidays are celebrated on different days on the secular calendar. Observance of Jewish holidays starts at sundown, and early closing times will be posted on the annual calendar.

The Preschool will close on the following federal holidays:

- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving (Thursday and Friday)
- Inauguration Day (when applicable)
- Presidents' Day

- Christmas Day
- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day

In addition, we are closed for a winter break at the end of December. We also close for a number of days at the end of August for teacher training and preparation for the upcoming school year.

While we respect the diversity of our families' observances in the home and outside of school, we do not celebrate the holidays of Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day or Easter in the preschool.

The annual calendar is published in late March for the following school year.

TUITION AND FEES

How can we pay the monthly tuition? Can we do an automatic payment?

Tuition is due on the 4th of each month. We will bill credit cards and bank accounts on the fourth (4th) of each month, or on the nearest business day if the fourth falls on a Saturday or Sunday. Late fees will be assessed starting on the 5th of the month.

We can charge the monthly tuition automatically to your credit card or through a bank draft/EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer). We accept Visa, MasterCard, Discover and American Express. You may bring a check each month. We do not accept cash payments.

Do we need to join the J? Does it include access to the gym? How much is membership?

All families whose children are enrolled in the Washington DCJCC preschool are required to be members of the 16th Street J, and the fees (\$329 annually) are included in your monthly tuition.

The memberships for all Preschool families have been upgraded to a full Fitness Membership. Your family will have access to all of the fitness facilities—pool, gymnasium, squash and racquetball courts, locker rooms, fitness center—and a wide range of group exercise classes free to Fitness Members. Your Family Fitness Membership will start on the first day of the school year; please visit Member Services for details and to activate your membership.

Why do you charge an activity fee?

The activity fee covers all field trips, the weekly music classes, special events, performances and swim lessons in the summer for our oldest classes.

IN THE CLASSROOM

How diverse is your school? How many Jewish or non-Jewish families are there? Do you have different types of families (e.g. single parents, same-sex couples, adopted children)?

We have Jewish, interfaith and non-Jewish families in our school. Non-Jewish families make up approximately 40% of the total families. We welcome all children, regardless of religion, race, family type or cultural background, to experience our exciting, nurturing program.

We have many different types of families at the J. We are proud of the diversity of the students and their families as we feel it strengthens the program and the children's development.

What kind of snacks do you serve? Are they Kosher? What foods can we pack in our lunches?

We ask that parents bring in a veggie or dairy lunch because the Washington DCJCC adheres to a kosher food policy. The [Preschool Parent Handbook](http://washingtondcjcc.org/kids-and-parents/preschool/Preschool-Parent-Handbook.pdf) has lunch suggestions: <http://washingtondcjcc.org/kids-and-parents/preschool/Preschool-Parent-Handbook.pdf>

Nutritious snacks will be provided in the morning and afternoon. They include such items as cheese and crackers, fresh fruit, vegetables and dip, cereal and milk, and yogurt. Processed products such as pretzels, cereal and crackers must have a *heksher* (kosher symbol), indicating that the product was prepared under Rabbinic supervision.

If your child has special dietary needs, please inform us.

Will my child move to an older class during the year?

In general, we do not move children from one class to the next except at the end of the school year in August. They stay with children their own age and have a greater opportunity to bond with their teachers and form friendships with the other children of the class.

How often do you clean the classrooms?

To decrease the spread of illnesses and germs, general housekeeping chores are part of the teachers' daily routine and toys are sanitized often. A professional cleaning crew also takes care of cleaning, vacuuming and mopping on a nightly basis. They also clean rugs/carpets and wax the floors as needed.

What are the ratios of children to teachers? What are the total class sizes?

The ratio is determined by the age of the children and the size of the classroom.

In the 2-year old class, the ratio is 4:1, with 12 children and 3 teachers.

In the 2 ½ year old classroom, the ratio is 11:2 (the maximum class size for that room is 11 children)

For the 3s, 4s and PreK, the ratio is 8:1. In the summer, a few campers join the PreK class, and we hire a senior counselor to work with the teaching team.

What's the age span of the children in the classrooms?

In our youngest classes, the age span is about six–seven months. The span increases with each class, and the largest span is in the PreK, where the children may be up to 11 months apart in age.

How often do the children go on field trips?

Field trips can enhance the curriculum and children's learning experiences. The teachers will arrange several field trips throughout the year, guided by the appropriateness for the age, weather conditions and interests. Parents are asked to volunteer to drive and/or chaperone at least one field trip. Car/booster seats are required for all children under the age of four and fewer than forty pounds.

Do the children nap? What about the older children?

We offer rest time each afternoon. We provide a cot or mat for all children with the expectation that they will use the time to rest. As the children get older, we will allow other quiet naptime activities. A washable, size-appropriate, labeled blanket needs to remain at the Preschool for rest-time and will be sent home weekly for washing.

What is your policy on Kosher food (*Kashrut*)?

The Preschool follows the *Kashrut* policy of the Washington DCJCC. All food brought into the school by parents must be dairy or vegetarian, and all of the food supplied by the school will be strictly kosher. All foods that are shared in class and at school activities must have a kosher symbol on them. This policy reflects a sensitivity to and awareness of the diverse practices within the Jewish community. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding our dietary policy.

What is your policy on discipline and conflict resolution?

We believe in “positive discipline,” which focuses on good behavior rather than bad, and follow the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices set by the National Association for the Education of Children (NAEYC). While some behaviors are typical for a specific “age and stage,” we recognize that children learn appropriate social behaviors at different rates. With that in mind, we observe and make individual behavior plans when necessary. As children get older, we encourage them to resolve conflicts on their own, building social skills and self-confidence in difficult, emotional situations.

For more information on our behavior policies, please consult the Preschool Parent Handbook.

What is your policy on computers in the classrooms?

We are fortunate to have access to computers in two of our classrooms. We use these as tools for the teachers to communicate with the parents via email, to prepare their “Today We” notes and to type up documentation. They may also use it for research. For the children, their use is limited to research and typing up their own notes with the direct guidance of the teachers. We do not use the computers for playing games or independent web-surfing.

Do you let the children watch television?

Occasionally, we will use video to enhance a lesson or demonstrate a point directly related to a project, for example to show an animal in motion, an example of a dance or for a “tour” of Israel. These will be used for specific educational purposes, and we will limit the duration of the videos.

CURRICULUM AND JUDAIC CONTENT

How Jewish is the curriculum?

We teach about the Jewish holidays and host a weekly Shabbat for the school. We teach human and universal values, but because we are a JCC, we teach them through a Jewish lens with the Hebrew phrases. These include *Tikkun Olam* (healing the world), *Tzedakah* (charity and justice) and equal rights for all.

Because our school is made up of Jewish, interfaith and non-Jewish families, we do not assume that every child and parent practices or knows all the aspects of Judaism. Therefore, we do some parent education about what the children are learning about and why.

How do you celebrate Shabbat in school? Does the school close early on Fridays?

Friday is a special day in our week: it is when the Preschool celebrates the Shabbat with a sing-along, blessing recitation and special snack of challah and grape juice. We celebrate and remember this day of rest that separates Shabbat from the week. We have found that this tradition is fun for all of the children, even those who do not observe Shabbat at home. We say blessings for the candles, “wine” (grape juice) and challah. The blessings (*brachot*) are listed in the Parent Handbook. We welcome and encourage parents to join us.

We maintain our regular hours (7:30 am–6:00 pm) on Fridays.

ADMISSIONS AND STARTING SCHOOL

When can my child start? How old do they need to be?

The Preschool is licensed for children ages 2–5; therefore, a child must have had his/her second birthday in order to start preschool.

If your child is turning two after September 2 but before December 15, we are able to offer you a spot for them to start after their 2nd birthday, but you will need to pay tuition for those months to hold the space. If you would like to defer, we can put you back on the list for consideration as spaces become available.

Starting before September is a possibility, but it depends on space being available in your child’s current age-appropriate class. Also, a child turning two years old in the spring or summer would be at least eight months younger than the youngest child in this year’s two-year old class. We prefer to keep the age ranges in a class much smaller as we feel it’s best for the children.

What is the application process for new students?

A waitlist application form must be submitted with a non-refundable \$50 application fee. We give siblings registration priority, and we then go by date of application. You may apply online, in person or using a paper form (available in the school or online).

Parents of children turning two years old will be notified in late January if their child has been accepted for enrollment in the two-year old class for September. Parents of children who will be three or four-years-old will be notified in early February, after our re-enrollment process has finished.

How do you make your admissions decisions?

Priority on the waitlist is determined by a number of factors, including, but not limited to, whether an older sibling has been a student, sign-up date, the age of the child and the spaces available. There is not an exact numerical order, but we do our best to be fair to all of our applicants and give you as much information as possible about your status.

What if we don't get a placement in the first round for fall admissions?

We will continue admissions on a rolling basis, with a one-week deadline to submit the signed contract and deposit, until all spaces are filled. We keep the waitlist throughout the year and will contact families as spaces become available.

If you do not get a placement for the first round, we will send you an email confirming that your family is still on the waitlist and the timing for the next round of announcements. We will keep you on the waitlist until you tell us to take you off. We will continue to accept students on a rolling basis as spaces are available.

If you wish to decline a spot we've offered, or if you would like us to take your child off our waitlist, please let us know as soon as possible.

We've been offered a spot for our child for the upcoming school year. What do we need to do to secure that?

To hold your child's space in our school, we require a signed contract and deposit payment within one week's notice of admission. All deposits, fees and tuition are non-refundable.

Are the first days of school shorter for new students?

To ease the transition of children new to our program, pick-up time for all **NEW three and four year old students** will be 12:45 pm on first day of school.

Children who are entering our **two-year old classes** (including the 2 ½ year old class and the late 2s/early 3s class) will have an abbreviated schedule to ease their transition. On the first day, the children will attend school from 9:30-11:30 am with a parent. On Wednesday, the twos will attend from 9:00 am-12:45 pm (including lunch) and Thursday will be a full day, although we recommend picking your child up close to 3:30-4:00 pm that day.

Returning students will start with their regular schedule.

Is there an orientation before school starts?

We offer a Parent Orientation Open House during our staff training and transition time before the start of school. This is a great opportunity for new and returning families to meet their new teachers and explore their new rooms. Please note that the teachers will be working on preparing the rooms for the first day of school, and they will not "look ready" at the time of the open house. The Open House date will be announced in May.

What forms do we need to fill out?

Our school and the DC Department of Health require many forms to be on file before your child starts school. Our deadline for all forms is June 1.

- DC Health Form for Preschoolers
- Emergency Contact and Pick-Up Form
- Enrollment Information Questionnaire
- Permission to Take Off Grounds

- Authorization for Child's Emergency Medical Treatment
- Dental Health Form (for all children three years and older)
- Tuition Contract

These forms must be updated annually and the most current versions may be found on our website: http://washingtondcicc.org/kids-and-parents/preschool/preschool-thisyear.html#Required_Forms_for_Students

STAFF

What are the staff qualifications?

Lead teachers meet the DC licensing requirement and often exceed the necessary qualifications. All have taken formal early childhood education classes, and many hold degrees in early childhood education or a related field. They are also well acquainted with Jewish values and traditions.

Assistant teachers also exceed basic requirements. Most of our assistant teachers are degreed. Others have early childhood education training and/or several years of experience working in an early childhood setting.

You may read more about our teachers online: <http://washingtondcicc.org/kids-and-parents/preschool/meet-the-teachers.html>

All teaching teams function as equals; co-teaching and sharing the responsibilities of the classroom are essential components to a Reggio-inspired curriculum.

What is the hiring process for new teachers? Do you do background checks?

All of our teachers, full-time and substitute, go through an interview process with the Director and our current teaching staff. They spend time in a classroom for a working interview as well. We check references and perform thorough background checks for all staff, including substitute teachers.

Do you have ongoing trainings for the staff?

We also believe that it is important for our teaching staff to be dedicated learners themselves, and we provide numerous opportunities for continuing education and professional development throughout the year, including trainings, conferences, mentoring and classes, as well as CPR and First Aid certification.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

How can families get involved?

We welcome and encourage parental involvement in a variety of ways. The Preschool Family Committee is open to all and meets on a regular basis throughout the year. The committee plans and organizes special events and fundraisers and supports the program and staff.

We host family activities throughout the year. These events are a great opportunity to get to know other families at the Preschool and to see your child in action with their school friends. We have a Back-to-School Night, Thanksgiving lunch, Chanukah party, Purim party, Passover Seder and summer class celebrations. We offer these at different times of the day and different days so that working families have an opportunity to join us.

Parents are always welcome for lunch, birthdays or simply for visits. Please make arrangements for celebrations with your child's teacher. We also invite parents to share their talents, occupations or hobbies with us.

The Preschool Steering Committee, made up of parents representing each of the classrooms, allows for quick communication between the school and parents, as well as discussing topics that concern the long-term goals and growth of the school. This group meets monthly and has frequent discussions via email.

How do you communicate with the families?

We feel that it is extremely important to be in close contact with parents in regard to your child's day. We can talk with you during morning or afternoon pick-up, or you can call during the day. Since drop-off and pick-up can be rushed and busy times for children, parents and staff, if you would like to have more than a few moments to chat, we encourage you to set up a phone conference or a personal conference time with the classroom teacher.

Communication is very important to us! No question is ever too small or too "silly" to ask. Please feel free to call with any of your questions or concerns. You are also welcome to stop by the Director's office at any time to talk.

We communicate in writing in a number of ways: Today We (a daily e-mail highlighting the activities of each class with reminders for calendar events), a parents' bulletin board, and notes and letters in your child's mailbox. We also have semi-annual parent-teacher conferences, a Back 2 School Night and regular Preschool Family Committee meetings.

Can we speak with a current Preschool family?

A number of parents have offered to speak to incoming families or families considering our school. If you would like to be connected to one of them, please let the Director know.

HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY

How secure is the building?

The 16th Street J takes security concerns very seriously. We have a full-time Security Director on site and a trained Crisis Management Team. Our Security Director constantly monitors situations that would affect the safety and security of our children and makes plans accordingly. We will keep parents up-to-date when specific situations arise.

We have evacuation and emergency response systems in place to best protect the students and staff in our program. We conduct periodic fire/evacuation/security drills for the entire building, including the Preschool.

Please note that the way to enter the Q Street location is through the entrance on Q Street. Members must show their ID to enter the building and parents will be given a preschool ID card to show at the front desk. **It is important that the doors to the Q Street entrance be securely closed behind you.**

If you have questions about these and other security systems in place, please contact us.

How do you handle allergies?

Please remember to alert us to any food allergies. We will offer children alternative snacks if necessary. This is one of the reasons why we do not allow children to share their food.

We post a list of children with allergies—with pictures—in each classroom so that all of the staff is aware of the precautions that need to be taken to protect our children.

Are peanuts allowed in school?

We are a peanut aware school: Our Preschool does not allow peanuts to be sent in the lunches. We do this to protect the safety of our students with severe peanut allergies. We cannot guarantee a peanut-free environment, but we will do our best.