

Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Hartford



Early Childhood Parent Guide

"Our task regarding creativity is to help children climb their own mountains as high as possible. No one can do more."

Loris Malaguzzi, (Early Childhood Director)

Reggio Emilia, Italy

Philosophy

The Early Childhood Program at Schechter celebrates the uniqueness of each child. Through a multi-age model, we respect individual differences in learning styles and growth patterns. We understand that children thrive socially, emotionally and intellectually when provided with a developmentally appropriate environment. Teachers are available to support and facilitate children's interests and activities. We create an environment that is nurturing and teaches responsibility, respect, values and independence. The children see themselves as an integral part of a Jewish community and learn that Judaism is a way of life.

Guided by The Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards

The Solomon Schechter Day School Early Childhood program uses the CT Early Learning and Development Standards in curriculum planning. This is a curriculum designed for preschool-age children. The curriculum identifies goals in eight areas of development: Cognition, Social and Emotional, Physical, Language and Literacy, Creative Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. At Schechter, we add Jewish Identity Development as the ninth domain. Through planned activities, classroom organization, materials, daily schedules and interaction with the children, we seek to accomplish the goals of the curriculum and provide your child with a successful start in school.

Inspired by The Reggio Emilia Approach

Our Early Childhood program is inspired by the Early Childhood philosophy of the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy. This approach focuses on fostering relationships among children, teachers, parents and community. An integral part of the approach is hands-and minds-on exploration. Children explore materials and media through an environment that inspires learning. Children also engage in long-term projects based on an "emerging curriculum" of children's interests, which is a central feature. The values and philosophy of the Reggio Emilia approach dovetail with Schechter's values and philosophy, enhancing the school's commitment to excellent Jewish and General Studies education.

Rooted in Jewish Tradition

At Schechter, Jewish learning, identity development and values are a part of everyday life. Torah study, Jewish culture, holiday celebrations, Israel, and Hebrew language are incorporated throughout our curriculum. There are opportunities for the children to experience math, science, music, art, sensory, cooking and literacy activities whether we are learning about Purim or insects. For some of our families, this is a first exposure to customs and traditions associated with being Jewish. Throughout the year there are opportunities for parent involvement and participation in family education programs. We view families as our partners and an integral part of our school community.

Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) Accreditation

Schechter is accredited by the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools, an accreditor approved by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). As an accredited school, we operate our program, including our early childhood program, with full authorization of CSDE. Because of our accreditation, our early childhood program is not

required to be licensed by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood and we do not maintain licensure with the OEC.

Our Staff

The Early Childhood teaching team holds degrees in Early Childhood Education and participates in ongoing professional development. In addition to our highly qualified early childhood staff we have an incredible support team which includes:

- Head of School
- Director of Early Childhood
- Director of Teaching and Learning
- Director of Programming and Student Life
- Director of Hebrew Language and Israel Education
- Admissions and Student Life Coordinator
- School Counselor
- School Nurse
- Visual Arts Educator
- Early Childhood Music Educator
- Physical Education Instructor

Home Visits

Before the school year begins, your child's teachers would love the opportunity to visit your home and spend a few moments getting to know your child in a familiar and comfortable environment. These home visits are optional but encouraged, as they help us begin our year grounded in trust, warmth, and partnership. We are offering visits on specific dates, and while we understand these dates may not work for everyone, they are the only ones available due to classroom setup and planning commitments.

Connecting with Families/Kaymbu

Each class will share photos, videos, daily classroom happenings and updates through the Kaymbu App. You will be provided information the first week of August. Once you receive the information via email, please promptly complete the Kaymbu Permission form so the teachers may begin sharing photos and videos of your student with you.

Technology and Screens in Early Childhood

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Fred Rogers Center state that "Technology and interactive media are tools that can promote effective learning and development when they are used intentionally by early childhood educators, within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice" (NAEYC 2009a). Children's experiences with technology and interactive media are increasingly part of the context of their lives, which must be considered as part of the developmentally appropriate framework.

At Schechter, the Early Childhood program uses technology to augment the curriculum, support learning goals, and enhance activities that are educationally sound and developmentally appropriate. Our Reggio Emilia philosophy generally emphasizes hands-on learning and interpersonal relationships, so technology will never be the

dominant part of student learning. Videos will rarely exceed 5-7 minutes. We only use technology when it is the most effective way to advance student learning.

Developmentally appropriate teaching practices must always guide decisions about whether and when to integrate technology and interactive media into the classroom, just as they guide the selection of any classroom materials, whether technology-based or not.

The Environment

Each Early Childhood classroom typically includes the following interest areas:

- Blocks (large and small building activities)
- Dramatic Play
- Atelier/Art Space
- Sensory/Science
- Cooking
- Library/Reading Center
- Writing Center
- Manipulatives/Math
- Mindfulness/Calm Center
- Outdoor Classroom space

The entire school is available for our use. In addition to the individual early childhood classrooms, we have access to:

- *Beit Tefilah*
- Auditorium
- Music Room
- Gymnasium

Class Size and Ratio

The Two-Year-Old class never exceeds a 1:5 teacher-child ratio. The Three- and Four-Year-Old classrooms never exceed a 1:10 teacher-child ratio.

Morning Drop-Off

Students Arriving by Car

Teachers and Administrators are available at 8:00 a.m. for early curbside drop off. Families will pull around the circle, help students exit their vehicles, and wish them a great day; students then enter through the “circle doors” (on the east side of the building). Nitzanim

(2-year-old students) will always be greeted by a teacher at curbside; after the first few weeks of school, Shorashim (3- and 4-year-old) students will enter independently, supervised in the hallway and be greeted by their teachers in their classrooms.

A timely morning arrival helps to ensure a smooth transition into the classroom each day. Our morning routine begins with an open-ended exploration time. The children may choose from a number of early learning provocations in all areas of development. Providing the time and opportunity to explore enables young children to develop their interests and passions in an unrushed environment. This is central to our Reggio play-based curriculum.

If you do arrive late, please go directly to the main office and a staff or faculty member will bring your student to their classroom.

Afternoon Pick-Up/After-School Arrangements

Early Childhood Morning Program

EC students who go home at 12:45 p.m. will be walked to the front of the building, where parents may pick them up. Students remaining at school after 12:45 p.m. dismissal, with or without written notice, will join the full day class; in that case, you will be charged for an extended day.

Early Childhood Full Day Students will be bags packed, ready to go at 3:25 p.m. (2:25 p.m. on Wednesdays and early Fridays). Parents of full day EC students will park, enter through the front door to pick up their child/ren in the lobby.

Early Pick-Up / Changes in Pick-Up

If your child must leave school early on a particular day, please notify the office and teacher in advance. When picking up your child, please come into the school office and your child will be called to the office. Students must be signed out of school in order to be released.

If someone other than yourself, or identified caregiver, will be picking up your child after school, please notify the office in advance, in writing. Both written notes and emails are accepted. The school will not release a child to anyone other than the parent or identified caregiver without such written notice. If a person whom the classroom teacher, faculty or staff has never met will be picking up your student, that individual must present photo identification before the student is dismissed.

Please notify us via the Dismissal Form 2026-27 for who has permission to pick up your child on a regular basis to keep on file. If written permission is not received, a school faculty or staff member will attempt to contact the parent. In the event that the parent cannot be reached, your child will remain at school.

ATTENDANCE/Absences/Add Ons

Regular attendance is essential for academic progress and social growth. Parents are urged not to schedule vacations during school days and to avoid scheduling medical appointments during school hours when possible.

Please do not send children with fevers, serious coughs, or serious colds to school.

If your student will be absent from school, please notify the office as well as your students' teachers via email:

office@ssds-hartford.org
teachers-nitzanim-alef@ssds-hartford.org
teachers-nitzanim-bet@ssds-hartford.org
teachers-shorashim-alef@ssds-hartford.org
teachers-shorashim-bet@ssds-hartford.org

There are no make-up days in our Early Childhood program. If you wish to add a day to your child's schedule, please notify KShakun@ssds-hartford.org at least 24 hours in advance. We will work to accommodate requests as long as teacher-student ratios are maintained.

Early Childhood After-School Programming

Schechter will offer Tzaharon (our Extended Day Program) for students in the Early Childhood program, from 3:30-5:30 p.m. each afternoon, with an earlier start time on Wednesdays and an earlier end time on Fridays during the winter. Students who participate will have a chance to explore, have a snack (please provide your own dairy or *pareve* snack) and participate in a variety of physical activities (both indoors and outdoors). Please note that there is no Extended Day Program/ Tzaharon on half days before holidays.

We also plan to offer additional after-school activities, both sports, yoga and arts; details will be forthcoming.

To sign up for Extended Day/Tzaharon please contact Karen Shakun at 860-561-0700 ext. 368, or by email at kshakun@ssds-hartford.org.

Parental Concerns

Partnering with parents is essential to building relationships and community. It is best to schedule a meeting with the classroom teacher to discuss issues that need special attention. Drop-off and pick-up times are very busy; please refrain from addressing concerns at these times unless it is something that needs immediate attention. Teachers are available to meet either before or after school by either in person or by phone. Parents should leave messages directly for the teachers by email to the teaching team to arrange a convenient time to meet. Teachers will do their best to respond to emails within 24 hours.

teachers-nitzanim-alef@ssds-hartford.org
teachers-nitzanim-bet@ssds-hartford.org
teachers-shorashim-alef@ssds-hartford.org
teachers-shorashim-bet@ssds-hartford.org

Appropriate Clothing and Footwear

Please dress your child appropriately for school; we encourage the children to participate in many messy, gooey and sticky activities, so comfortable play clothing is best. For safety, please send your child to school in closed-toe shoes only (**no crocs or sandals please**).

Sneakers are to be worn on Physical Education days. Please provide a full set of extra clothing (including shoes) for your child's cubby.

Children are encouraged to wear a kippah for Kabbalat Shabbat and when we visit the Beit Tefillah.

Snack and Lunch

Early Childhood students eat in classrooms. The program provides a healthy nut-sensitive morning snack at 10:00 a.m. Please let us know if your child has any allergies, food or otherwise, of which we should be aware. Children registered for our full day program are asked to bring an afternoon snack in a separate container. Please provide your child with a labeled water bottle daily.

- The Early Childhood classes eat lunch at noon. We are a kosher/dairy school. No meat from home please.
- Please send your child's lunch in a labeled "lunch box." All food containers should be labeled as well. Please provide napkins and labeled utensils. We suggest investing in a hot/cold thermos and ice packs as we are unable to heat or refrigerate lunches. Your child's teachers will assist with unpacking and packing up lunch boxes.
- School lunches will be available for children in EC daily. More information will be sent home when the program begins.
- The Schechter EC program advocates for nutritious foods and healthy choices. Teachers encourage the children to eat their "main course" first and eat other food items after. We respectfully ask that you **refrain from sending candy** in your child's lunch.

Important Note on nuts and allergens:

Our kitchen is nut free, as are our school lunches. Due to the severity of allergic reactions to tree nuts and peanuts, and to the fact that some pre-school children may have an undiagnosed nut allergy and be too young to express that they are experiencing signs of an impending allergic reaction, we have adopted a nut-sensitive policy for all of our Early Childhood classrooms as of the 2021-2022 school year.

- No food items that contain "peanuts" or "tree nuts" as a listed ingredient
- No food items that state that they "may contain traces of peanuts and/or tree nuts," should be sent to school.

You may send items whose ingredient label states "processed in a facility that also processes peanuts and/or tree nuts" or "manufactured in a facility that also processes peanuts and/or tree nuts."

Food-Free Birthday Celebrations at School

Your child's birthday is a joyous occasion and we look forward to celebrating with you and your student in the classroom.

Creating a safe school environment for your student is of the utmost importance. To ensure the well-being of our students, we are requesting that birthday celebrations be "food free." Please do not distribute any food items to the children in the class.

There are many fun and celebratory ways to acknowledge your child's birthday. You may donate a book to the class in honor of your child. If you have a special talent, please come in to share it with us. If you would like specific suggestions, your child's teacher would be happy to help you.

Please arrange a date and time with the classroom teacher and join us for stories, special songs, birthday wishes.

Birthday Celebrations Outside of School

We work hard with our students to teach them the value of inclusion, of not judging others and of learning from everyone. **When planning parties—for birthdays, bar/bat mitzvahs, or other special occasions—don't leave anyone out!** Plan on inviting the entire class. If for some reason you are only inviting 2-3 children, send invitations in the mail. Please do not exclude only a small number of children.

When hosting a birthday celebration outside of school, please keep our values of *Kehillah* (community) and *Mitzvot* (Jewish Practice) in mind. Birthday parties should not be held on Shabbat, or on Jewish holidays for which school is (or would be) closed:

- Rosh Hashanah
- Yom Kippur
- Sukkot
- Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah
- Erev Purim and Purim (note: school is not generally closed on Purim, but a party would conflict with the many joyous communal celebrations that we encourage families to attend)
- Pesach
- Shavuot

Unified Arts and Ivrit/Hebrew

Early Childhood students participate in P.E. and Music once a week in addition to their regular classroom activities. Shorashim students also participate in Ivrit/Hebrew once a week.

Field Trips

The Early Childhood classes take field trips throughout the school year. Your child's teacher will notify you when a trip has been scheduled. Classroom parents chaperone and provide transportation.

Toys and Items from Home

We ask that your child does not bring toys from home to school. We encourage the students to use the toys and materials provided for them at school. Items of special significance or books that relate to the current topic exploration and learning are always welcome. A "Lovie" for rest time is encouraged if your child is staying the full day.

Allergies, Medications and Sunscreen

If your child has allergies and/or requires medication during school hours, please consult with the school nurse.

Apply sunscreen prior to arriving at school, and please do not leave sunscreen in your student's cubby or backpack. If your student attends the full day program and requires an additional afternoon application, please contact the school nurse.

Diapering and Toilet Training

If your child is not toilet trained, please provide an ample supply of labeled disposable diapers and wipes. Diapers will be changed at scheduled times of the day and as needed. Your child's teachers will reach out to you when your supply is running low. Please replenish diapers and wipes in a timely manner; we do not supply these items at school.

Toilet Training

In the toilet training process we respect each individual child's growth and development. We do not believe in hurrying children in this process until they show clear signs of being ready for this important stage of growth.

If a child begins to show interest in toileting at home, the classroom teachers will partner with families to support students as they embark on this very important developmental milestone.

Signs of readiness may include:

- Having dry periods of at least 2 hours or waking up dry after a nap
- Disliking the feeling of a wet diaper
- Showing interest in other's bathroom habits
- Verbalizing that they are going in their diaper
- Showing interest and willingness to sit on the toilet or potty chair

It is best to begin this process when the child is home for several days before he/she is expected to stay dry in a less familiar setting. Please allow at least 3 days of staying dry before sending your child into school wearing pull ups or training underwear. Also, once the process has begun please bring a large supply of pull-ups **with side openings** or training underwear. We ask for pull-ups or the thicker training underwear as it is more absorbent and thus more sanitary for the classroom setting.

Please reach out to your child's teachers to set forth a plan to make sure your child's toilet-training experience is a positive one.

Extra Clothing and Soiled Clothing

Please provide a labeled change of clothing for your child to be stored in their cubby. Please include an extra pair of shoes and socks. We suggest periodically and seasonally checking your child's extra clothing supply.

If a child has soiled their clothing the teachers will send it home in a parent provided labeled reusable wet bag (please see EC supply list) for laundering. We do not have laundering facilities at school.

Conferences

The Early Childhood team holds formal parent-teacher conferences twice a year. Parents will be notified of the date and will need to sign up online to schedule a conference. Although we hold formal conferences twice a year, we welcome parents to communicate with teachers on a regular basis.

Narrative Progress Reports

Families will receive (via email) one narrative progress report from their child's teacher in mid June.

Early Childhood Social/Emotional Development and Behaviors of Concern

Classroom Community:

EC teachers work to provide students with the tools to be successful in a classroom community. When children are struggling with a conflict, teachers provide support and help them to verbalize what they need/want and model appropriate behavior. If the conflict is physical (pushing or pulling), a teacher will intervene, address safety concerns, and work on "unpacking" the problem along with the students to develop solutions. Teachers reflect on the importance of acknowledging feelings both emotional and physical and reinforce that "our" school is a peaceful community. This sets the tone for an environment that reflects the core values of Schechter.

Mindfulness, Calming , Redirection and "Taking Space":

Schechter Early Childhood classrooms practice mindfulness, meditation and yoga daily. Mindfulness increases a child's ability to regulate emotions, feel compassion and empathy. The practice of meditation and mindfulness in early childhood settings builds key skills like focus and self-control. If a child is struggling with a conflict a teacher may suggest breathing techniques to calm down. A student may be asked to "take space" for a while to calm down before returning to an activity. A "calming center" is available in all of the EC classrooms, complete with a variety of sensory items for the child to choose from. Redirection often involves either having a child explore another activity in a different part of the room or one-on-one time with the teacher. A teacher may read with a student, play a game or work a puzzle with a student who needs to reset. Many times a teacher will take a dysregulated student for a walk or run outside or in the gym. This provides the child with movement, a break from the routine, a distraction and the opportunity to refocus.

Parent Communication:

If there is an incident in which a student has hurt another student, both families will be notified. Families will also be notified if a student has repeated challenges occurring on the same day. If a behavior of concern continues on a consistent basis, families will be asked to schedule a meeting to discuss an individual behavior plan for the student.

Todah Rabbah for Choosing Schechter Early Childhood

Early childhood is a time of wonder, discovery, and remarkable growth, and we are honored to partner with your family during these meaningful years. We believe children thrive when families and educators work together in a supportive, trusting partnership. By fostering open communication and shared goals, we will nurture your child's curiosity, confidence, and love of learning as they grow, explore, and reach their fullest potential.