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Contact: Katrina Selawsky
781-828-4800
info@learningcirclepreschool.org

LEARNING CIRCLE PRESCHOOL IMPLEMENTS *THE EARLY SPROUTS CURRICULUM*, A GARDENING AND NUTRITION CURRICULUM DEVELOPED AT KEENE STATE COLLEGE, KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Canton, MA, January 4, 2010 - Learning Circle Preschool, a non-profit school for preschoolers and kindergarteners ages 2.9-7, is preparing now for its second full season using *The Early Sprouts* curriculum. *Early Sprouts* is a gardening and nutrition curriculum developed at Keene State College, in Keene, New Hampshire. After staff attended the *Growing a Green Generation* conference last May at the Durham campus of the University of New Hampshire, teachers and families have worked together to bring this “seed to table” curriculum model into every classroom at the school.

Components of the *Early Sprouts* curriculum address research that indicates young children tend to be reluctant to try new foods without multiple exposures that include a variety of experiences, including sensory exploration, tasting, and cooking. In a 24 week sequence of classroom activities using six common vegetables, children participate in sensory exploration, observations, and investigations of the vegetables and the plants from which they come. They help cook simple recipes at school, share them at snack, and then share those same recipes with family at home.

“When we attended the conference in New Hampshire last May, we had already planted beans, tomatoes, lettuce, and a variety of herbs for the children to care for through the late spring and into our *Summer Art and Science Program*”, explained Elaine Beguerie, a teacher at Learning Circle Preschool. “Children who cared for these plants through harvest definitely made the connection to our fall explorations of vegetables, and seemed more willing to try the recipes right from the start. This spring we hope to have the children participate in planting each of the six vegetables used in the *Early Sprouts* curriculum. We are beginning to plan for even more gardening space on our playground now.”

Parents have noticed a change in attitude among the children, who seem more willing to try new foods. When children find they don’t care for a recipe, families have joined teachers in wording responses carefully, suggesting to children that “they don’t like it yet.” We’ve seen more than one picky eater give a vegetable a try on the second or third exposure, and find that they do indeed enjoy healthy foods!

One parent of a picky eater wrote this email to us recently:

“I just wanted to write while the excitement was still fresh and express to you my gratitude for establishing this program at the Learning Circle! This week my son, a child who has never been adventurous with food and has always stayed far away from veggies, ate two helpings of vegetables. We made the Cheddar and Chard quesadillas tonight with our dinner and he not only tried them, he even dipped them in the salsa. He went on to finish his entire helping complete with the salsa declaring his love for this food with each bite. I had goose bumps watching him eat this meal; I could not believe my eyes. I have spent many hours pouring over articles and recipes claiming to help your child try new foods, to no avail. We cook together, he helps pick out the food at the store, and still he will not try anything but his comfort foods. However I feel as though this Early Sprouts program is on to something. The way that the children become so familiar with the vegetables, studying where they come from and how they are harvested seems to really take away the mystery and stigma that veggies usually hold for children. Additionally, giving the children an opportunity to cook the foods at home with family and taste them again in an environment where they feel safe and comfortable certainly helps. Having a chance to graph what the family thinks of the recipe really added that extra bit of motivation that helped him to let go of his hesitation and fear of the new food and taste it. I can’t thank you enough for finding a way to make vegetables exciting and enjoyable for young children!”

The *Early Sprouts* curriculum’s feature of bringing recipes home to share with family is one that the children seem to really enjoy. Families are encouraged to cook the featured recipe at home, and then children let their friends at school know how the recipe was received at home. Conversations about diverse taste preferences are enthusiastically shared by the children.

For more information about programs at Learning Circle Preschool and about available spaces for this year’s summer program or the 2010-2011 academic year, please contact the Director, Katrina Selawsky, at 781-828-4800.

Learning Circle Preschool
3 Blue Hill River Road
Canton, MA 02021
info@learningcirclepreschool.org
www.learningcirclepreschool.org