



Watertown Cooperative Nursery School

MORE ABOUT WCNS

Watertown Cooperative Nursery School (WCNS) has been educating children for more than 40 years. WCNS owes its success and longevity to its ability to provide vibrant and relative educational services and remain responsive to our families. Our teachers are experienced, skilled and dedicated to the healthy growth and education of young children. As a cooperative, WCNS is a place for parents to be truly involved with their child's early educational experience. Children are treated with the utmost respect and their needs are lovingly met. Families, who are alumni of the school, return often to tell us how glad they are that their children experienced school for the first time at WCNS.

Educational Philosophy: WCNS creates an environment in which children grow and thrive socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. The environment is safe, caring and respectful of children. It is a place where friendships can develop and positive reinforcement is constant. Our goal is to make children feel good about themselves and their accomplishments.

Discipline: At WCNS, the purpose of discipline is to teach children self-control and to help them identify and positively solve problems. Teachers always intervene to prevent harm to another person or to property. Teachers model problem-solving language for the children to help them internalize these skills. No child is asked to "sit out" alone. However, a teacher may remove an upset child from the group to a quiet, out-of-the-way area where comfort is given and the child can successfully calm down in order to finally work out the problem. In the case of a dispute between two children, the teacher will redirect or remove both children from the group to talk out their problems.

Daily Schedule: Each day is divided into blocks of time for outdoor play, free play, group time, story time and snack. We play outside for 45 minutes each day, weather permitting. Our playground is well equipped with climbing structures, swings, a giant sandbox, riding toys, a playhouse and additional equipment for physical development. Classroom design incorporates areas for open-ended art projects, water play, manipulative toys, puzzles, blocks and dramatic play. Activities are varied and respond to children's emerging interests and current classroom themes.

Parent Involvement: Parents spend a morning in the classroom about every three and a half weeks. They bring the snack for that day and set it up with their child. Their child enjoys the special role of being that day's "parent helper kid." Parent helpers supervise the children under the teacher's direction. In addition, some parents serve on the Board of Directors that meets monthly to discuss policy, budget proposals and the general direction of the school. Other parents choose to participate on a committee, such as fundraising, enrollment, education, publicity or maintenance. At various times during the school year, parents may be involved in fundraising events, parenting workshops and social gatherings. Parents also participate in a work weekend before school starts to clean the school and playground and to make repairs.

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Staff: There is an excellent adult to child ratio in both classrooms at WCNS. All staff members are highly experienced (please refer to our staff bio page) and fully certified by the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services at the preschool level. We often have a student teacher from a local college or university, which further reduces the adult to child ratio. Teachers are warm, nurturing, enthusiastic and highly professional about their work. They can be reached at work or home to discuss children and the lines of communication between school and home are always open.

Curriculum: Curriculum is developmentally appropriate and responds to the needs of the children. Each child is considered individually when activities are planned. We challenge a child with a great wealth of materials that stimulates all areas of development. Topics for learning come directly from the child's interests and abilities. All materials are "hands on" or experiential, because at WCNS we believe that children learn mainly from direct experience with their environment. Reading readiness activities are incorporated into the curriculum. The school has a library of over 200 books and books on tape. The classroom is designed to be a "language-rich" environment with labeling used throughout the school and easy-to-access books and materials.

Extended Day Options: Extended Day options expand the benefits at WCNS beyond that of a traditional nursery school. Each day, up to 24 children may be accommodated in the extended day program. Families elect to participate according to their needs. Early Bird begins at 8:30. Children may bring a breakfast snack and enjoy quiet activities before the morning program begins. Lunch Bunch meets from noon until 1:00p.m. Children bring a lunch from home and eat with friends and teachers and play afterwards. Stay Day extends from noon to 3:15p.m. Children eat lunch, rest or nap and enjoy an extended story time or quiet play.

Toilet Training: We encourage parents to have made an effort at toilet training before their child comes to school. In the event that a child is not yet toilet trained, we will work together with the parents to accomplish it. Bathroom use is built into the daily classroom routine. The school is not readily equipped for changing and diapering children, however, accommodations will be made for children who are still accomplishing toilet training.

Holidays: We observe each child's birthday with a special snack and song. Usually, the birthday child's parent is that day's parent helper. We celebrate the change of seasons, joy of learning and being together but observance of religious holidays is left to the individual families.

For additional information and photos visit our website at
www.watertowncoop.org



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OUR TEACHERS

Margaret Clermont - (Director, and teacher in the yellow room)

Margaret earned her BA from Boston University and her Masters in Elementary Education from State College of Salem. She furthered her education by taking twenty-one additional credits in early childhood education from Boston College, Wheelock, and Massachusetts Bay Community College. Margaret taught fifth grade for five years in Milton and Topsfield, followed by five years as lead teacher for 4 year-olds at Wellesley Community Children's Center. She has been the director of WCNS since the 1980s. Margaret lives in Newton, and is the proud mother of two grown sons.

Laura Palmer - (teacher - yellow room)

Laura earned her Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education from Aquinas Junior College and continued her studies for two more years at Lesley College in Cambridge. Laura lived in Alaska for six years, where her daughter was born in 1993. She first came to WCNS as a parent, substitute teacher and camp counselor, then joined the staff as a full-time teacher in 2001.

Heather Seymour - (teacher-purple room)

Heather graduated from Massachusetts Bay Community College in 1990, with an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education. She taught at The Preschool Experience in Newton, and for eight years at WCNS, before having twin daughters in 1998. She then ran a home day-care program for six years and returned to WCNS as a full-time teacher in 2005.

Mary Gilfoyle - (teacher-purple room)

Mary completed her BA at Lesley College, and her Masters in Creative Arts in Learning/Early Childhood Education at Lesley University. She taught at the Perkins School for the Blind for six years. She has also taught at the Bowen Coop Nursery School and the Little Red Wagon Playschool, in Newton, and the Evergreen Day School in Cambridge. Mary first came to WCNS as a parent and then joined the staff as a full-time teacher in 2005.



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SUMMER CAMP

Watertown Cooperative Nursery School Summer Camp is an eight-and-a-half week program that begins after school closes. The hours are 9am to 1pm, 5 days a week. Early drop off is available at 8:30 and stay day is available from 1pm to 3pm.

Staff: Camp director Margaret Clermont and Yellow Room teacher Laura Palmer are the lead teachers for camp. In addition, two or three college-age counselors (often graduates of WCNS) are used depending on enrollment. During the month of July when camp enrollment is less, there will be 12 and 13 year-old counselors-in training (C.I.Ts). Many of these C.I.Ts are graduates of WCNS.

Activities and Daily Themes: Weather permitting, the children are outside the entire morning. WCNS Camp has three wading pools, one usually located at the bottom of the slide, one with toys, and one for splashing and “swimming.” In addition, there are six different sprinklers that are rotated daily, the water table is moved outdoors, and the hose is available for building in the sandbox.

Each camp day has its own theme. Favorites are pajama day (everyone wears pajamas), messy day, pizza day, boat day, bug day, pasta day, costume day and treasure hunt day. Children are encouraged to bring in books or toys related to each day’s theme. Treasure hunt day is the last day of camp and children from past years return to visit and enjoy the day at WCNS.

Schedule: The camp day officially begins at 9:00am with free-play outside until 10:15. Morning snack is served outside from 10:15 to 10:30, followed by water play and swimming from 10:30 to 11:45. Stories and singing are from 11:45 to 12:00 and then everyone has lunch from 12:00 to 12:30. Camp ends at 1:00pm. Ages are mixed for camp activities during the entire day. Children are divided randomly into two mixed age groups for cubby areas and lunch.

Children bring their own lunch to camp. A snack is provided, usually juice pops or crackers or a snack related to the day’s theme (i.e. watermelon on messy day). Afternoon juice pops are offered to stay day children after rest time, and plenty of drinking water is available throughout the day.



A recent survey of our alumni parents asked;

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL POTENTIAL PARENTS ABOUT WCNS?

Here are some responses:

That, as long as you are willing to participate at some level, WCNS will provide their kids an opportunity to be part of a wonderful adventure in learning and growing that will give them a secure foundation, happy memories, and confidence in themselves.

It has a great place to learn and grow. The environment is so positive and supporting. Kids love the curriculum and the terrific summer program. The camp is a plus and it is so much fun. The extended day program provides coverage for those who work and those who just need coverage for an afternoon here or there. I can't say enough about how great the teachers and the community are.

I would want them to know that the 5 day program will be beneficial to their child. The co-op is a place where they will build a new community for their family and make wonderful new friends and gain much support from other families. WCNS has been wonderful for our family.

I would want them to understand the reasoning and research behind a play-based program

WCNS will enrich your child in ways that are not typical. There is no programmed learning because it is all play based. However, the unfettered creativity and ability to explore on their own will really shape how they act and think in the future. I have seen it for myself. We are not creating "learning robots" at this school. We are fostering independence and a love of learning.

They'll never regret it. It's the most caring place in the world. Their kids will enter Kindergarten excited about school and well adjusted socially and always remember it fondly. I know we do!

That parent involvement is not optional! We are a coop and as such the responsibilities should be explained at tours and in writing upon acceptance. This would not only pertain to fundraising responsibilities but the idea that parents will be involved in the classroom (parent helping) as well as at board meetings.

I've had children at two other preschools, which really can't compare to WCNS.

My children love going to WCNS. They are being taught by experienced and caring teachers. They are learning so many things - more than just the strict academics of letters and numbers, like how to express themselves in constructive ways, how to resolve conflicts and how to solve problems. It is a wonderful community; I am constantly amazed at how lucky the school is to have such committed and intelligent families involved. I think you only get that by having the parents so intimately involved in the operations of the school.

Don't judge a preschool by whether it has computers

By Barbara F. Meltz, Boston Globe | September 29, 2005

Unless you count the plastic one next to the two real-but-not-connected telephones in the dress-up corner of the yellow room, there's no computer in the classrooms at Watertown Cooperative Nursery School. In the search for the perfect preschool, that could make or break some parents' decision.

Teaching director Margaret Cleremont makes no apologies. "If what they are looking for is reading skills and worksheets and an emphasis on academics rather than on social and emotional development, we're not for them," she says.

Her preschool, housed in the basement of the Community Church on Main Street, certainly has a traditional look to it, but even an unseasoned observer can tell that lots of learning happens here. A teacher drops red food coloring in the water table as 4-year-olds ooh and aah. "The water feels the same," a child marvels as it turns a deeper red.

Choosing a preschool is daunting. Is the general atmosphere stimulating but not hurly-burly, calm but not catatonic? Are materials within children's reach or do they have to ask for them? How often do they play outside? How much free play is there? Do the hours of operation fit your schedule? Is there extended day? What happens if you're late at pick-up?

The issue of computers adds one more layer of confusion. Also controversy.

For the first time next September, guidelines for accreditation from the prestigious NAEYC (pronounced nay-see, the National Association for the Education of Young Children) will include a provision encouraging technology in the classroom, from tape recorders to microscopes, computers to cameras. The standards, to be unveiled at the group's annual conference in December, "are a recognition that technology is part of kids' lives," says Barbara Willer, deputy executive director. (NAEYC accreditation, which is voluntary, is considered the gold standard in the industry. State licensing is mandatory.)

For an organization whose emphasis for nearly 80 years has been the importance of open-ended play, this is a big deal.

"It won't sit well with everyone," concedes Willer. "We're not turning our backs on play. We're asking for more thought and planning. Since there are computers in more and more preschools, let's get teachers more mindful about how they use them."

For parents choosing between two programs, one with a computer and one without, educational psychologist Jane Healy of Vail, Colo., says she "wouldn't consider the computer a knock-out factor. But it would prompt me to ask a lot of questions." Healy is author of "Failure to Connect, How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds" (Simon & Schuster).

"Here's what parents need to know," she says: "It's not that a computer is good for young children. It's that it might not hurt if it's used wisely." Conversely, not having a computer is not a sign of an inadequate program.

In her search for a preschool for son Otis, 4, Diane Wheeler of Belmont visited an astonishing 34 schools before -- bingo! -- she saw Watertown Cooperative. That there were no computers wasn't the deciding factor, but it

didn't hurt. In her experience, schools with computers tended to have other aspects she also didn't like.

At some schools, all she could hear was teachers' shouting. "No! No! No climbing the tree! No throwing stones! You rarely hear that here," she says. "It's not that there aren't rules, but a teacher is more likely to go over to a child and say, 'The rule is, no throwing stones. Someone could get hurt. But you can stack stones or make a pile of them, like this.' That encourages problem-solving and learning." Similarly, other schools were likely to put a finished product on the art table, a not-so-subtle way of saying, "Make this." At Watertown Cooperative, teachers put out materials. Children do with them what they want.

"I'm sending him to preschool for socialization and, yes, learning. But to me, it's not what they learn but how they learn that counts," says Wheeler.

If there is a computer, it should never be used as a reward for compliance in some other activity, and its use should never be required. "Consider one chair in front of the computer a red flag, as well as one child alone at the computer," says early childhood educator David Fernie, dean of education at Wheelock College. "This is a stage of development when that's way too isolating." He wouldn't be upset, however, if three boys who are building a fire station in the block corner go to the computer together to create a sign for it.

"What you want to see is the computer making a concrete, interactive, social experience more complex," says early childhood technology specialist Karen Murphy, also of Wheelock. "If the preschool promises the computer will 'teach,' and they're offering software like 'Math Blaster' and that God-awful Einstein software, or anything that requires a child to click on the letter 'A,' beware." The only software she recommends for preschoolers is KidPix by Broderbund; "I Spy" by Scholastic; or any of the Living Books, also by Broderbund. (Her favorite: "Sheila Rae, the Brave.")

What else do you look for when you're shopping for a preschool?

Figure out your needs beyond the logistics of a school's hours and location. "If you have a shy child, you may not be interested in one large room with mixed age groups; you may want a center that feels more like home and has small groupings," says early childhood educator Roxy Leeson, assistant director of WarmLines in Newton. Leeson leads workshops on preschool decision-making, and WarmLines publishes a preschool guide and is sponsor of an early-childhood expo Sunday at the Fessenden School in Newton (visit warmlines.org for info). The state Department of Early Education and Care (eec.state.ma.us/), formerly the Office of Childcare Services, is also a good resource.

The only way to really know what a program is like is to visit.

"Spend 15 to 30 minutes, and be there during free play," Leeson says. Pay attention to all kinds of interactions, not just teachers to children (Are they respectful, empathetic, and empowering?) but also teachers to each other. As role models, they influence how children will treat each other.

Expect to see plenty of signs of literacy: letters, numbers, signs, books, a cozy reading corner with big pillows, and materials for them to do their own invented writing. "You want a setting to be authentic," says Fernie. "That means the play materials and the environment have some connection to the real world the child lives in -- for instance, the play corner has waiters' pads and menus from restaurants. So what if they can't read or write? They pretend."

In a reading corner at Watertown Cooperative, where parents take turns in the classroom, 3-year-old Kate Esbenshade of Newton snuggles next to her mother, Anne, who is reading to a small group. Kate is Esbenshade's third child and she shopped around. Watertown Cooperative is Esbenshade's third preschool. "Each child is different, with different needs," she says.

In the 4-year-old room, Nick Iselin of Watertown is setting out snacks with his son, Porter. He learned about the school through word of mouth. "We started hearing about it when Porter was 1," he says. "People told us we'd be crazy not to send him. Now I know why."

In her workshop, Leeson's first advice to parents is to find out about application procedures. Deadlines vary from school to school and so do application policies. Her last advice is to find three schools you like. For good reason, too: Watertown Cooperative (watertowncooperativenurseryschool.org) is first-come, first-serve. It's accepting applications now for next year, but it gives priority to siblings. Most of the 32 spaces already are taken.

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