



COMMUNITY
NURSERY
SCHOOL

STAFF HANDBOOK
(Rev.9/21)

Part 1 Guiding Principles

Philosophy & Beliefs

Children at CNS

Parents at CNS

Teachers at CNS

Inspiration from Italy

Documentation at CNS

The Environment at CNS

Part 2 Organizational Information

A. Hiring and Promotion

Criteria

Procedures

Salary determination

Resignation

B. Staff Orientation

C. Staff Meetings

D. Professional Training, Supervision & Evaluation

Training

Observation

Supervision & Evaluation

E. Staff Responsibilities

General

Co-teachers

Director

Community Coordinator and Bookkeeper

F. Time Off

Sick leave / Personal days

Professional days

Jury duty

Substitute teachers

G. Discipline

Initial probationary period

Subsequent probation

H. Staff Complaints

I. Abuse & Neglect

I. Community Nursery School – Philosophy and Beliefs

In 1945, Community Nursery School was established as a cooperative nursery school. We have a rich history of believing in the value of parents and teachers as partners. Research continues to show that when parents are active participants in their children's education, children benefit tremendously. We believe that parents and educators benefit as well.

Vision

We believe that early childhood is a special and unique time when, with collaborative relationships and an inspiring environment, every child should have the opportunity to explore their sense of wonder, spirit of inquiry and joy of learning that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Mission

- CNS is a safe and nurturing cooperative community where families, teachers and children collaborate as part of our play-based approach, providing opportunities for each child to joyfully grow and explore.
- Our philosophy, informed by the practices of the schools of Reggio Emilia, is child centered; where each individual is capable and curious.
- Our environment fosters a child's innate curiosity and sense of wonder through connections made with the natural world and each other.
- Our community bridges home and school through observation, open communication, documentation of student learning, and collaboration. • When children leave CNS they take with them confidence and trust in their surroundings and a long-lasting network of meaningful relationships with people of all ages.

Core Values

Above everything else we value:

- our child-centered approach;
- our strong sense of community;
- the power of collaboration; and
- the joy that underpins everything that we do.

At CNS:

- We believe that parents are the primary educators of their children.
- We believe that each child, parent and educator comes to Community Nursery School with a unique way of seeing the world, making connections and constructing knowledge.
- We believe that it is our job to pay close attention to these unique qualities and use our observations and understanding to guide us in our work.
- We believe that everyone's voice is important, that everyone has something of value to contribute - and everyone deserves respect.
- We believe that the more we can learn about each member's perspective,

the richer and stronger our community becomes. This applies to children and adults alike.

- Parents and teachers are dedicated to working together, always with the joyous learning of their children as their focus.
- We believe that children thrive in an engaging, supportive and flexible environment.
- We believe that educators must be committed to their continued learning in order to provide meaningful opportunities for children and families.

Children at CNS

Children gain a great deal from sharing their mornings at school in an environment where parents play an important role in the daily life at school.

At CNS:

- Children are welcomed into an environment that supports them in feeling safe and comfortable as they make the transition to this new world away from home.
 - Children learn about the joys of making friends and becoming valued classroom members as they work and play together.
 - Children learn about different cultures, interests, professions and family structures within the context of life at school.
 - Children notice that the grown-ups in their world are working together for their benefit.
 - Children make choices and explore many different types of materials in a safe, flexible and engaging environment.
 - Children have a balance of activities that support their right to a variety and range of experiences over the course of the morning.
 - Children share their questions and theories in an environment of respect and encouragement.
- 4
- Children have a chance to build upon previous experiences as they construct knowledge.
 - Children are respected for their unique ways of seeing and thinking about things and are provided with myriad opportunities for representing their understanding and learning.
 - Children learn to become important members of a group and community, alongside their friends, parents and teachers.

Parents at CNS

At CNS, parents play an important part of daily life. When parents are in the classroom on a regular basis they gain a window into their child's experience away from home.

At CNS:

- Parents experience first-hand what their child's day is like at school.
- Parents learn about the choices and connections that their child makes at school.
- Parents see the world through their child's eyes – and have an opportunity to share their joys, their struggles and their sense of wonder.
- Parents match names and faces of their child's classmates. • Parents learn about the teachers' styles of teaching and learning. • Parents share an experience with the teachers -- building a common language for communication about their child.
- Parents help to build a bridge between home and school. • Parents gain a sense of belonging and become important members of the CNS community.
- Parents take part in decision-making for the benefit of their children. • Parents gain a sense of ownership and belonging as valuable community members.
- When parents collaborate and share in community building experiences they are modeling important values of cooperation, sharing, and respect for the children.

Teachers at CNS

Our teachers have chosen to work at CNS because they are committed to working together with children and their parents in an environment that supports all members of the community – as individuals and as a group.

5

At CNS:

- Teachers consider children to be unique individuals who are competent and curious and deserving of respect.
- Teachers learn a great deal by listening to and observing children.
- Teachers learn from each other by exchanging their thoughts and ideas, observations and theories.
- Teachers use these shared observations to inform them as they proceed in their work.

- Teachers learn from the parents about their joys and concerns, hopes and dreams for their children.
- Teachers are committed to providing a safe, flexible and engaging learning environment for children.
- Teachers value collaboration and communication between all members of the CNS community.
- Teachers feel a sense of responsibility for sharing their learning and their curiosity with all members of the CNS community.

Inspiration from the Schools of Reggio Emilia & Pistoia, Italy

Some of the overarching themes that have carried CNS for more than seventy-seven years include a deep respect for children and their families and the importance of building community.

In the recent past, we have learned about the early childhood programs in Reggio Emilia and Pistoia, Italy. They do an extraordinary job of creating learning communities where these universal values are strengthened through dialogue, collaboration and continued growth on the part of all members. We have been struck by many of the common goals and values between CNS and Reggio. We have also noticed that these schools in Italy are like a beacon – the ways in which they integrate theories about child development and education into their environment and their work is inspiring, thus filling us with a sense of possibility for the growth of our school.

Just as we have always believed that the adults set the tone at our cooperative in modeling the values of working together, exchanging ideas and respecting both our common and unique threads, so too do we model an atmosphere of growth and learning when we continue to explore ideas together. We believe that this serves to strengthen, enhance and enrich life at our school. A learning environment for adults supports the growth of children.

6

When parents are in the classroom they may notice teachers taking pictures or writing down children's words. Throughout our school you will notice photographs and text. The text may be the words of children, teachers, parents or others whose words may inspire us to make connections. Teachers may send pictures home either via the internet or in a journal. We refer to all of the ways that we capture life at school as "documentation". Consider thinking about this documentation as a mirror.

Documentation at CNS

Documentation serves:

- To make visible and bring to light the day-to-day life at school.
- To build a common language and shared experience to support our value of parent/teacher partnerships.
- To validate for the children that what they say and do is very important and worthy of taking notice.
- To provide an opportunity to revisit, remember and reflect upon past experiences.
- To support the value of gaining new perspectives and building connections.
- To support our value of learning about the children from the children.
- To encourage collaboration and further planning based on what we have observed.

Nothing happens at school in isolation. We believe that learning is ongoing and that each day and each moment builds upon previous ones. The more information we have about the children, the better job we can do at supporting their growth and development. The more careful and attentive we are at observing the children, the better equipped we are to think about what is to come next. When we listen very closely, we hear what the children are really asking and telling us. This sometimes requires speaking much less or waiting longer than our natural nurturing instincts may otherwise dictate. Yet the better able we are to let go of our own way of thinking and put ourselves inside the minds and hearts of the children, the more we come to understand that they have their own theories. Their theories demand our time and respect. And not until we can meet them at the place where their thoughts and theories lie, can we expect them to meet us.

7

The Environment at CNS

At CNS, the environment plays an important role in creating an atmosphere that reflects our beliefs. We have learned from the schools of Reggio Emilia the value of considering the environment to be another teacher.

At CNS:

- Careful thought goes into the arrangement of the environment.
- This thought is based on observation of the way in which children move around the classroom and use materials and equipment.
- Teachers introduce “provocations” in the environment to stimulate the children’s curiosity, sense of wonder and encourage new possibilities. • Opportunities are always made to support children as they engage in ways that feel comfortable for them.
- An environment that is aesthetically pleasing reflects our respect for children and fosters their sense of wonder.
- The outdoor environment is an extension of the indoor space.

II. Organizational Information

Community Nursery School is a cooperative nursery school run by a Board of Directors made up of parents, one teacher representative and the educational director. CNS is licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.

A. HIRING AND PROMOTION

Criteria: CNS does not discriminate in hiring on the basis of race, religion, cultural heritage, national origin, political beliefs, marital status, disability, sexual preference, age or gender. All teaching staff must conform to Massachusetts EEC qualifications to be considered for employment at CNS, as follows:

Director--two years Lead teacher; or one year as director; or master's degree with background in early childhood education and administration; meets EEC "Director I" requirements.

Teacher--two years teaching experience as classroom teacher and/or degree from program in early childhood education, with associated teaching experience. Follows EEC qualifications.

8

In addition, all employees must complete and pass a full Background Record Check as required by EEC, before hire. This includes a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information), SORI (Sex Offender Registry Information), DCF check (Department of Family and Children) and Fingerprinting.

Promotion will be the first option considered in filling a vacancy, provided that the candidate fulfills the position requirements as outlined, above.

Procedures: Formal application and interviewing is required for all candidates for any full-time position, whether existing staff or new applicants. (a) When a new Director is needed, the Board shall appoint a joint parent/staff search committee, chaired by the President or Vice President. Qualified candidates shall be interviewed jointly by at least one staff member and parents from the Search Committee. Their recommendation for Director shall be presented to the Board for final approval. (b) When a staff position becomes available, the Director, in conjunction with staff and parents, selects a replacement as follows:

- (i) Director develops contacts;
- (ii) Director and a designated Board member and/or staff member interview qualified candidates;
- (iii) Prospective candidate(s) visit and observe at CNS;
- (iv) References are checked and, if applicable, candidate is observed in previous work setting;
- (v) Director makes final decision using all input above, and presents new candidate to the Board and membership.

(c) Occasionally, part-time staff may be hired from a pre-existing pool of candidates.

Salary Determination: Individual salaries are based on staff members' position, educational background and number of years' experience in a related field. They are determined by the Director and Treasurer using established pay scale guidelines as well as other relevant criteria.

Resignation: Staff members resigning their position must give at least 4 weeks written notice. The hiring process requires a great deal of time and energy, and it is crucial for the children and the teachers that the transition be a smooth and comfortable one.

B. STAFF ORIENTATION

All new staff members receive and are required to read copies of the Staff Handbook (which includes personnel policies and operating procedures relevant to the staff) and the Parent Handbook (which includes statements of philosophy, organization, policies and procedures for the school programs).

The Director will spend time with new employees to go over in detail all of the new staff member's responsibilities as well as thorough explanations of the school's educational and cooperative philosophies. The Director will also familiarize new staff members with the space, location of equipment, supplies, first aid, resource materials, books, etc. New staff members shall attend at least one full staff meeting before working in the classroom.

In addition to reading all of the above information and materials in the handbooks, the following information must be covered verbally during the staff orientation which will take a minimum of two 1.5 hour sessions: personnel policy,

statement of purpose, statement of non-discrimination, health care policy, maintenance of children's records, confidentiality policy, program plans, behavior management plan, abuse and neglect policy, termination and suspension policies, program plans, transportation plans, referral procedures, procedures for parent helping and parent visits, input, conferences, and communication. The Director will explain that CNS falls under the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care as its licensing authority and that the complete set of guidelines and regulations are available in the main office.

C. STAFF MEETINGS

The Director holds an orientation meeting during the week before school begins. Regularly scheduled staff meetings take place thereafter (except during holidays and vacation time). Notes are taken during each meeting on a rotating basis by a staff member. Staff members who are unable to attend due to illness or other reasons are responsible for notifying the Director of their absence, for reading the notes as soon as possible when they return to school, and initialing their names indicating they have done so.

The purpose of these meetings is to address school issues of programming, meeting the individual needs of children, policies, procedures, and parent communication. These meetings also serve to encourage the shared learning and exploration of topics that will support both individual and group growth in relation to their work at CNS. Staff members are also welcome to raise any related issues for discussion. It is hoped that these meetings will provide opportunities for the exchange of experiences and ideas so that staff members may learn from each other.

In addition, each classroom team meets weekly to discuss program planning and how it relates to the children's development. Long-range goals for the group as well as specific goals for individual children are discussed regularly in relation to the curriculum. The team will also meet with the Director during one of their weekly scheduled team meetings, each month. This is to ensure that the Director is informed of any ongoing in the classroom, be aware of the needs of children, families, and teachers, as well as be available to provide support as needed.

Teachers of children receiving special education services also meet with specialists and special educators, as needed, to discuss the child's progress. Teachers may be asked to attend Team Meetings arranged by the Special Education Department for children receiving services. When both teachers are not in attendance, the results of these meetings are always shared with the second teacher.

D. PROFESSIONAL TRAINING, SUPERVISION & EVALUATION Training: All staff members teaching 5 days/week are required to receive a minimum of 20 hours of additional training each year, including EEC required trainings, seminars, conferences, workshops, in-service training, discussion groups, classroom observation, etc. Topic areas include skills training in program planning and group leadership. At least one third of the hours must be in the area of diverse learners. This would include but not be limited to such topics as identifying children at risk, individualizing the learning environment, working with families of children at risk, and creating a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Staff members working between ten and twenty hours per week need twelve hours of professional development with one third in the area of diverse learners.

The Director is responsible for providing staff with suggestions for fulfilling these requirements. Occasionally specialists in related fields will attend staff meetings to provide opportunities for professional growth. In addition to attending workshops, seminars, and conducting early childhood coursework, staff members may receive professional development hours by participating in the Massachusetts Department of Education Early Learning Services Video Lending Library program.

All staff members must be certified in First Aid training which is renewed every three years. In addition, EEC requires that a minimum of one staff member with current CPR certification will always be present at any and all times when children are under care. The Director, however, recommends that all staff members receive CPR certification, which is to be renewed annually.

11

Observation: Staff members will be given opportunities to observe teaching and care giving behaviors in other classrooms at CNS and elsewhere as scheduled with the Director. Arrangements will be made for someone to substitute when a staff member is observing in another classroom.

Supervision: The Director meets with each teaching team at least once a month to exchange impressions of how the classroom is running. In addition to weekly informal visits to the classrooms, the Director schedules formal observation time to focus on specific areas that are mutually agreed upon as goals for professional growth. After each observation, another meeting occurs to share observations and to define further ways to achieve goals. In addition, the Director meets individually with each teacher at least twice annually, and more

often as deemed appropriate.

All teachers are asked to write self-evaluations on an annual basis. The Director conducts an annual written evaluation of the performance of each Teacher as well. Staff members comment upon these evaluations in writing and, after follow-up discussion, sign the evaluations which are then placed in their files. The Director provides staff members with relevant literature and materials, when appropriate, to augment their knowledge in the field of early childhood education.

E. STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

We pride ourselves in respectful, caring and purposeful partnerships at CNS. Communication and collaboration are the key guiding forces that support smooth, successful and meaningful work of all who spend their days at CNS. We recognize that each staff member brings unique qualities to the group and value the fact that we all can learn from and support each other.

General responsibilities/expectations applying to all staff members:

- Understand procedures for entering and closing up building securely. Support Community Coordinator by notifying her when supplies need replenishing (see list on clipboard in Resource Room).
- Share information that other staff members need in order to perform their job to the best of their ability (i.e., issues of concern regarding a child, a family, pick-up arrangements, and classroom, building or grounds).
- Answer the phone if you are the only person in the building.
- Assist in keeping the Resource Room and common spaces neat and organized - put things away in their appropriate space after use .
- Bring the phone outside if no one is inside. Understand how to check voice mail and do so as needed.
- Lock and secure building if you are the last to leave.
- Maintain familiarity with Parent Handbook and Staff Handbook. • Cell phones/smart watches - Teachers, parent helpers, and administrators will refrain from using cell phones when with the children. When necessary teachers, parent helpers, or administrators will remove themselves from the classroom or playground environment in order to use a cell phone. There is an understanding that sometimes a phone call or text must be returned, but every attempt shall be made to do so outside of the children's environment.

Co-Teacher

- Plan and execute educational program consistent with CNS philosophy;
- Arrange for regular collaborative planning meetings with team Teacher and maintain records of meetings;
- Support other adults in the class;
- Conduct two scheduled conferences a year with each family, including written reports in each child's file;
- Maintain timely daily communication with parents via email; • Share classroom pictures weekly with parents and children via email or web.
- Keep Director informed of pertinent information related to children and their families (illness, family crises, questions and concerns about child's development);
- Write report of any injury or serious accident of classroom children; • Report any evidence of child abuse or neglect per Mass. law; • Attend regularly scheduled staff meetings;
- In rotation, represent staff as Board Teacher Representative; • Interview prospective teachers when appropriate;
- Attend school-wide parent/staff events;
- Pursue professional development outside CNS (as required by EEC) and maintain documentation of completed hours;
- Work closely with Special Educator to meet needs of all children receiving special services;
- Maintain clean and functional child centered classroom space and rotate materials at least four times during the year.

13

Director

- Develop, coordinate and administer the educational program; • Supervise teaching staff and conduct weekly staff meeting; • Support staff in their ongoing professional development
- Maintain regular communications with President, Board and Membership;
- Support parents in their parent participation roles;
- Develop and manage annual budget in conjunction with Treasurer and Finance Committee;
- Develop long-range funding strategy in conjunction with Fundraising and Finance Committees;

- Ensure compliance with legal requirements;
- Ensure cleanliness, safety and proper functioning of physical plant and grounds with Maintenance and Building Committee chairs;
- Represent CNS to the public, including preschool functions, the press, Lexington School Department, and professional organizations; • Schedule regular meetings with each team and individual teachers as deemed appropriate;
- Participate in professional development as it supports the ongoing growth and development of the school

Community Coordinator

The Community Coordinator will support the Director in all internal administrative aspects of the school and provide a resource for teachers, parents, and children.

Bookkeeper

- Bookkeeping (Day to Day; Week to Week; Month to Month; YTD) • Invoicing (Quarterly tuition as well as monthly lunch and extended day payments)
- Accounts Receivable (includes supporting Development Committee and YBF Committees)
- Accounts Payable
- Assists with monthly reports
- Make bank deposits
- Processes monthly payroll

14

F. TIME OFF

PTO: All salaried staff members teaching 5 days per week are entitled to paid sick leave at the following rates: 10 days /school year

Those salaried staff members working 2 or 3 days receive 4 and 6 respectively.

PTO days are not cumulative.

Other examples of time off: Staff may take non-sick days off in consultation with the Director, who will attempt to balance the needs of the classroom with the needs of the teachers in granting such permission. Such days off include time for bereavement, acute family crisis, other family time away, etc.

All issues and decisions related to staff members taking time off beyond their entitled number of sick and personal days will be at the discretion of the Director. The Director may consult with the President and/or Treasurer as appropriate when making such decisions.

Professional Days: Teachers are allowed two professional days per year in order to attend conferences or workshops; observe at other schools; or other such related activities.

Jury Duty: Staff members called to jury duty will be paid by CNS unless or until staff member is compensated by the court for serving jury duty.

Substitute teachers: It is the staff member's responsibility to arrange for their own substitute teacher with Director consultation. Both the Co-Teacher and the Director should be notified of absences and substitute arrangements.

It is the staff member's responsibility to notify the Director and Co-teacher of any anticipated absences as far in advance as possible.

There is a calendar in the Business Manager's work area, where anticipated absences and substitute teacher arrangements are documented.

15

G. DISCIPLINE

Initial probationary period: There shall be a three-month probationary period to allow the new staff person and the CNS community an opportunity to ensure that all requirements of the job are being met. If for any reason (which is documented by verbal meeting and written observation) the position is not working out, the contract may be terminated without prejudice.

Subsequent probation: If a staff member is not maintaining the required level of professional standards (e.g. negligence, physical misconduct, unresolved interpersonal dispute, not meeting contractual obligations, etc.), the employee in question shall be subjected to the following steps:

- verbal warning
- written documentation
- probationary period
- dismissal if all else fails to correct the problem.

Serious unprofessional behavior (for example, that which puts the children's safety at risk) will result in immediate termination.

All disciplinary situations will be handled in strictest confidence between the Director and President, as determined by the issue.

Concerns about the conduct or performance of any staff member should be expressed to the Director, or if appropriate, the President. The safety and well being of the children, parents and other staff members is always our primary concern.

H. STAFF COMPLAINTS - Grievance Policy

It is expected that staff differences will first be handled directly by the parties involved. Every attempt should be made to resolve differences in a positive and mature manner. When necessary, the difficulty should be brought to the attention of the Director who will mediate.

If the problem lies between a staff member and the Director, the President of the CNS Board shall be called upon to mediate. The President shall make every effort to help resolve the differences to the satisfaction of both parties. In the event that the President requires additional support, s/he may form a sub committee to work toward resolution. Confidentiality shall always be maintained throughout the resolution process.

Please keep in mind that when you are at work, you are a professional. Just as we try to teach our young children to accept and appreciate our differences, it is

16

important to internalize that understanding in a way that allows us to treat one another with respect. Staying focused on our purpose, our philosophy, and our mission should help to keep things in the proper perspective.

I. PREVENTION OF ABUSE & NEGLECT

The safety and welfare of children is always our primary concern. All staff members are mandated to report any suspected cases of abuse or neglect. Staff should bring their suspicions to the Director immediately. Together a decision will be made about informing the parents and then to call the Department of Social Services (617-868-1400). A written report - a "51A" - must be filed within 48 hours. If it is felt that notifying the child's parents of the report could jeopardize the child's safety, the Director may decide not to do so. The Director will also notify the President of the Board that a report has been filed, although confidentiality will be maintained.

If the alleged abuse or neglect of a child has taken place while the child is in the

care of CNS, the Director shall notify the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care immediately after filing a 51A report. The school shall cooperate fully in all related investigations. An allegedly abusive or neglectful staff member shall not be allowed to work directly with children until the DSS completes its investigation and for as long as the EEC requires.

** The CNS Parent Handbook contains the Health Care Policy, Plans for Infection Control, Safety Rules and Guidelines, Emergency Procedures and other important information. Staff members must read and follow all of these requirements and procedures. **