

FAQ's

Q: What exactly is a cooperative preschool, and how is it unique?

A: Cooperative preschools are developed by and run by parents. Our school board, whom we entrust to guide and vote on issues effecting our school, is a panel of volunteers voted on in spring by every family in our school. Parents who are not on the school board are welcome to attend every board meeting to express ideas and opinions. Parents hire qualified teachers and a qualified director to teach their children and run the school. Our co-op was developed in 1976 by a group of parents who felt strongly that their presence in their child's classroom was ideal, and the many talents of the parent community could be pooled together to maximize the whole family's experience in their child's first educational experiences.

The advantages of a co-op for us as parents are that we have the unique opportunity to attend class with our children. We see qualified, trained professionals interact with our children in ways that help them grow, giving us ideas to implement at home. We see where our child is developmentally, and we have the support of our teachers to help us as parents. We also branch out and make connections with other parents, which strengthens and bonds our local community. We go to school with our children and learn along beside them.

The advantages of a co-op for children are that our children attend a school where everything is scaled to their size, and in a safe environment. Our children have opportunities to interact with other adults, and through the year get more and more comfortable with those other than their own parents. Each year a child is part of a co-op, the more and more "family-like" the classrooms become. Our children learn to respect the rights of others, their similarities and differences. They learn through experiences tailored to their developmental level.

Q: What are the parent's commitments?

A: In addition to being a parent helper on a rotating basis, parents are expected to chaperone two field trips during the school year. Parents are also asked to serve on one committee throughout the year. Committees range from planning field trips to helping with publicity for the preschool. Parents are also expected to attend one toy cleaning night during the school year.

Q: What do parents do as parent helper?

A: Parents rotate through the classroom as parent helpers. The frequency depends on the class size and the number of days the class meets. If the class meets 3 times a week and there are 18 kids in the class, the parent will be the helper every 6 weeks. As parent helper, the parent helps engage the children in the activities of the class, is expected to bring in the snack for the day and get it ready for snack time, help lead one of the day's centers, and help keep the classroom clean.

Q: What is GCNS's educational philosophy?

A: We are different from most other preschools in that we are parent-run, and our staff and parents are a true team. We are a play-based school, meaning that we teach preschool skills through enriched, educational play experiences. Our curriculum is thematic. We are a community school, so our children do learn through experiencing the world around them by attending field trips.

Q: What is the curriculum?

A: Our curriculum is structured around our educational philosophy. We teach through play and through integrated themes. For example, in September we learned about apples and pumpkins, attending a field trip to the apple orchard. The teachers taught the children songs and fingerplays, the children created apple mini-books, taste-tested apples of different colors, did beginning math and literacy activities using fall themes, and much more!

Q: What is your licensing and teacher credentials?

A: All of our teachers and teacher aides meet or exceed all the qualifications put forth by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in Illinois, our licensing organization. Our teachers have college degrees in education, are background checked, and come to us with excellent references. They are all first aid and CPR trained annually. All have had years of experience teaching before the Co-op. In fact, all our teachers were first parents of our school before teaching with us! Our teachers stay up-to-date by attending educational workshops and complying with Illinois State Preschool Standards.

Q: What safety precautions are in place?

A: Our doors remain locked at all times. The teachers open the doors only for parents dropping off or picking up students. Parents are required to sign their children in at the beginning of class time, indicate who is picking their child up and a number that they can be reached at during class time. Only people listed in the required paperwork are allowed to pick a child up.

Q: What are your teacher to student ratios?

A: We always have three adults in the classroom with each class. Our parent helper is included in our ratio along with our teacher and teacher aide. We are regulated by DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) in regards to how many adults to children are required, but we exceed the standards in every class:

- 2/3 class- required 1 to 8, we have 1 to 4
- 3/4 class- required 1 to 10, we have 3 to 19
- 4/5 class- required 1 to 10, we have 3 to 19

Q: How do you deal with separation anxiety?

A: Separation Anxiety is a very normal occurrence in preschool settings. It is a team effort between the parents, child and teachers to help each child be comfortable in preschool. Certain children are very cautious and can be slow to warm up, and that is very normal and can even be healthy. We encourage parents to convey their excitement about preschool to their children (children pick up on our clues). Parents should say to their child, “You will play, have snack, then do your project. After that, I will pick you up!”. We also encourage parents to help their child engage in play at drop-off, tell them you are leaving, and then make an exit. Prolonging the good-byes can exacerbate the anxiety, and even cause other children to become anxious. Our teachers will help redirect any children who have anxiety, through play or by giving them a special job. In our school, separation anxiety is usually very short-lived (about 5 minutes), and with parents

helping out in the classroom, our children see it is a safe (and fun!) place. Our presence in the classroom is reassuring to our children!

Q: How are field trips conducted?

A: The 3/4 and 4/5 classes attend multiple field trips throughout the school year, while the 2/3 class attends two field trips. Parents chaperone field trips on a rotating basis. For the 3/4 and 4/5 classes, this is twice a year and for the 2/3 class it is once a year. Parents are responsible for transportation to and from the field trips. Siblings are usually allowed to attend if they pay the applicable fee; however, if a parent is the chaperone, siblings are asked not to attend.

Q: Do the kids get to play outside?

A: Our teachers try to get the kids outside to play whenever time and weather permits. GCNS is in the process of building a playground and fenced green space for the kids to run and play as much as possible.

Q: How do you deal with food allergies?

A: We fully accommodate children with food allergies. It is important for parents to communicate their child's allergies with their teacher and the director. Together, we come up with a plan that works best for the child and all the children in the class.

Q: What happens if a child has an accident?

A: All children must be fully potty-trained, with the exception of the first semester in the 2/3 class. We are not licensed through DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) to change soiled diapers, so if an accident does occur, the parent will be called to clean up after their child. In the older classes, and the 2nd semester of the 2/3 class, if a potty accident does occur, we encourage each child to carry a back-up set of clean clothes in their backpack each day. We understand that accidents do happen, and try to be prepared just in case!

Q: What is the “down payment” policy?

A: We collect May of the following year's tuition at the beginning of the school year to be held as a security deposit for your spot. If you choose to leave the school before the end of the year, this security deposit is used for your last month's tuition. In the event that your child's spot is filled by another student, this deposit will be refunded in full.

Q: When is enrollment?

A: Enrollment for the following school year occurs in January. We do in-house registration first, followed by alumni registration, and finally public registration. However, enrollment is open throughout the year for any class that isn't full and a wait list is started for classes that are full. In the event that a student leaves the school and a spot opens, we offer the spot to the first person on the wait list.