

the tree

The newsletter for Families Together Cooperative Nursery School

Summer 2011



On to the next adventure!

By Christine Whitley, MA, LPC
Family Therapist & Education Consultant

About one year ago, I sat in an uncomfortable folding chair with tears streaming down my face. I was singing “Make New Friends” in the round with my daughter Aislin’s preK class and this was the last day. After two years we were saying goodbye to the cozy nest of Families Together and flying off to the scary world of “real school” and full-day Kindergarten.

Now that I am on the other side of the Kindergarten transition, I hope I can offer you some words of comfort and wisdom to help you, and your child, cross that bridge a little more smoothly.

Start preparing yourself and your child for kindergarten over the summer. Take her to see the school before it begins, even if it’s just to play on the playground. Call and ask if you can visit, meet the office staff, or see the kindergarten classroom. We used to drive by Aislin’s school when we picked up her dad from work and act all excited. “There’s your kindergarten!” I would holler. “It’s going to be such an adventure!”

An adventure can be fun and exciting, but it can also be scary and anxiety-provoking. Aislin is a very outgoing child but when she doesn’t know what to expect she’s not always eager about the

journey.

One thing we did to help Aislin feel more at home with the idea of kindergarten was to find other kids going to the same school. We knew a few kids from Families Together who were going to her new school so we had a few play dates over the summer. If there aren’t any Families Together kids at the new school, look for an online parent group or a forum in which you could meet some other families. Or contact the school to see if they can help you arrange a few group playdates for the class.

Aislin also really enjoyed reading stories about other kids going to kindergarten. Some of her favorites were “Kindergarten Rocks!” “Emily’s First 100 Days of School” and “The Berenstain Bears Go To School.” We read these over and over and talked about what her school would be like.

One piece of advice my daughter had for her fellow Families Together students: it’s OK to be a little scared when you go to Kindergarten. Everyone feels nervous their first day. This goes for parents, too! Find a sympathetic friend to meet you for coffee or make a phone call from work after you drop your child at school. I remember telling a friend not long after Aislin started kindergarten, “It’s not like preschool. I have no idea what she does there all day!” And he replied, “She’s living her life.”

FROM THE PRESIDENT...

Hello ‘new’ and ‘old’ FTCNS families!

I hope this letter finds you in a true summer state of mind—enjoying being outside with your kids, playing in water and sand, and taking a break from the often frenetic pace of the school year.

This summer marks a big kind of break-taking for me as this past school year was my last as a board member. My four (!) wonderful years on the board have helped me to grow as a parent and professional, and I am so grateful for all of the support and encouragement that I have received from fellow board members and the parent community.

It is hard for me to believe that my own family is entering our fifth year at FTCNS. It seems like just yesterday when I was lugging my soon-to-be-Mixed-Age-4-year-old in his infant car seat “bucket” while I dropped off his older brother for Young 3s. While the time has flown by, I have been able to stop and savor the wonder of having two very different children thrive at and love the same school.

One of the unique facets of FTCNS is that it can be the “right fit” for a myriad of different types of young personalities. Our teachers have the training and sensitivity to see these differences and adapt their approach and curriculum whether our children are extroverts or introverts, dreamers or concrete thinkers, budding paleontologists, chefs, fork-lift drivers, rock stars, artists, fairies, or firefighters.

While our school has core tenets that are unwavering—our play-based philosophy, our commitment to maintaining a true cooperative, and our focus on the socio-emotional development of children—we are also incredibly flexible.

We hope that each child and adult’s relationship to the school evolves and changes, depending on your needs and desires.

As you fill out your 2011-2012 paperwork, I encourage you to share how we can be the right fit for your family in the year ahead.

Have a wonderful summer.

— Laura

School News

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Unveiling our new vision ...

By Meg Mortensen
Incoming board president

It is with great pleasure that I present, on behalf of the Board, "A Vision for the Future: FTCNS Strategic Plan 2011-2015." A lot of time and effort from various members of our community went into articulating a clear vision for our school and into creating the five-year plan. The plan is a blueprint to guide school leadership in decision-making over the next few years with respect to critical issues such as growth, space and diversity.

I would like to thank the teachers, staff, parents and Board members who did research, worked on sub-committees, and gave up several Saturday afternoons with their families to wrestle with who we are, what we value most about this school, and what we want for children in the years to come. I would



also like to thank organizational consultant Beth Black, founder of Act3 Organizational Collaborators, who led us through the process, wrote the final strategic plan, and will continue to help us focus on our goals.

This plan is intended to help our community focus energy on an inspiring vision and long-term goals. We are excited by the scope and specificity of our strategy, which is laid out in the seventy page plan. It will be an integral tool to help guide the Board in making strategic decisions in the next few years. This Vision Statement is at the heart of our new strategic plan.

With your help and that of the school staff, and Board, I am confident that we can execute this plan and achieve our shared vision for the future of Families Together Cooperative Nursery School.

If you have any questions about our vision or the larger strategic plan, please contact Meg Mortensen at President@ftcns.org.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE: FTCNS STRATEGIC PLAN 2011-2015

FTCNS, a cooperative preschool on Chicago's north side, will be highly regarded as a unique educational program recognized for excellence in:

- **Providing a joyful early school experience** for young children in a welcoming, dedicated facility near a playground or large, outdoor space.
- **Offering young children a play based experience** based on an emergent curriculum developed in response to the children's needs and interests.
- **Operating as a well run cooperative** in which a close knit, diverse community of engaged parents work collaboratively to ensure smooth daily operations by actively participating in school governance, volunteering in the classroom, and contributing to school fundraising efforts.
- **Demonstrating a deep commit-**

ment to diversity and equity through intentional educational practices and hiring, admissions, and financial policies that welcome families from a variety of socio economic, ethnic, cultural, religious and family backgrounds.

- **Providing an affordable, high quality education** through sliding scale tuition, financial aid, and school-wide fundraising efforts.
- **Supporting parents of young children** by providing informative, engaging parent education activities and materials.
- **Integrating environmentally sustainable practices** and healthy food options into daily school activities and operations.
- **Promoting professional growth** for the school's staff by providing funds that support their individual and group development plans.

Our favorite homemade play dough

Here is our go-to recipe, plus some ideas to make it special:

2 cups flour
1 cup salt
2 Tablespoons oil
2 cups water
Coloring/scents as desired*

1. Combine all ingredients in a pan and mix well.
2. Bring to a boil over medium-low heat, stirring constantly until the mixture pulls away from the sides of the pan.
3. At this point, put the dough onto a table and knead to finish. Feel free to add more flour now if it feels too wet or sticky. Dough shouldn't stick to your hands.
4. Allow to cool completely and then store in an airtight bag or container. It should last 1-2 weeks before drying out.

* To add color and/or scents to your play dough, you can add a variety of extras.

Colors: A packet of Kool-Aid adds both color and scent. Drops of food dye, watercolor paints, or tempera paints (a few tbsp) will change the color.

Scents: Kitchen extracts (i.e., vanilla, orange, almond) or essential oils (i.e., lavender, honey-suckle) dropped into the pan will add a nice scent to the finished play dough. Just add the color/scent a bit at a time until you are happy with how it looks and smells.

Activities

ON THE GO

Road trip survival kit

Chances are you'll find yourself on the road this summer, with a trip to see the grandparents, a visit to a favorite vacation spot or a day trip to explore something new. And chances are you'll bring along a bag of tricks to entertain the kids. Here are some ideas, for the car or the plane, to get you started.



■ Travel potty.

Great to take anywhere that you may not have access to a sanitary bathroom, such as the park, beach or on the road. Don't forget wipes and a small hand sanitizer.

■ Mess-Free Activity Books.

Little hands need things to do on long trips, and there have been loads of innovations since we were riding in the back of the station wagon. Paint with water activity books, for example, can provide some much needed stimulation, fine motor use, and best of all, no mess.

■ Dry-erase books or board.

For kids that are a little better with keeping the mess to a minimum, smaller dry-erase marker books are great to keep in the car for coloring or practicing writing skills.

■ **New music.** No road trip is complete without great music. But you can only listen to "Wheels on the Bus" so many times before losing consciousness — definitely a road hazard. With your sanity (and safety) in mind, here is some kid- and parent-approved entertainment.

John and Mark's Children's Record: Chicago-area musicians feature songs about everything from lawnmowers, counting to "Pat, The Alligator Lady."

Yo Gabba Gabba Music: Fans of the television show will agree that the original music on the show by bands like The Shins, The Roots and the show's own characters really make learning lessons catchy and fun.

James Kochalka Superstar: While most of this Vermont indie-musician's music is definitely NOT family friendly, there are several tracks on the album *Monkey v. Robot* that are great fun for kids. "Hockey Monkey," "Pizza Rocket," "Peanut Butter and Jellyfish" and "Bathroom Buddies" are all rated G, have fun lyrics.

■ **Audio books.** Many come with the book so kids can follow along.

George and Martha Read Along Book and CD: Adorable best friend hippos teach great lessons in these five stories.

The Cat in the Hat and Other Dr. Seuss Favorites: Your kids will be able to recite along side famous voices like Dustin Hoffman, John Cleese, Walter Mathau and more.

Combel Editorial Picture Books with CDs: These are a series of beautifully illustrated picture books written in Spanish accompanied by a CD.

■ **Good old-fashioned car games.** Everyone remembers those games they played as kids on long family car trips. Keep a list on hand when the kids start getting restless and need a distraction.

I'm thinking of a ...: Yes or no questions asked by the person who is not "it" narrow down the item to what the "it" person is thinking of. Stick with themes that kids can ask lots of questions about, such as "I'm thinking of an animal."

The Alphabet Game: Find words that begin with each letter of the alphabet on road signs. The first person starts with A, then the next with B and so on.

I spy: There are loads of interesting things to see, and usually not touch!

FREE MUSEUM DAYS

Chicago Children's Museum
700 E. Grand Ave., at Navy Pier
On the first Sunday of every month, (August 7, September 4, etc.) children under 15 are free. Every Thursday after 5:00 p.m., all visitors get free admission.

The Field Museum
1400 S. Lake Shore Dr.
August 8, 29, 31
September 1, 6, 7, 12, 13, 20, 21, 27, 29

Museum of Science and Industry
5700 S. Lake Shore Dr.
September: all weekdays starting on the 6th
October 31

Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum
2430 N. Cannon Dr.
Every Thursday is a suggested donation day.

Shedd Aquarium
1200 S. Lake Shore Dr.
Sept. 12, 13, 19, 20, 26, 27
Oct. 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, 18, 24, 25, 31

Garfield Park Conservatory
300 N. Central Park Ave.
Always free or suggested donation admission. Free parking.

Family Fun Festival at Millennium Park

Every day through August 21, between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., performances and hands-on activities take place in the Family Fun Tent, located on the Park's Chase Promenade North.

Performances by Old Town School of Folk Music's Wiggleworms, art projects, readings and more are all available for free.

Also, take a walk through Lurie Garden, cool off in the Crown Fountain or have a picnic lunch on the lawn of the Pritzker Pavilion.

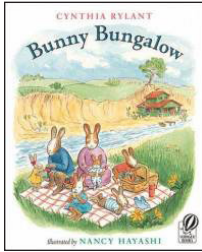
Check the website for more details, as well as scheduled performances: www.millenniumpark.org

Activities

BOOKS

Learning life lessons through stories

Here are four recommendations from Deadre Lorber, our literacy teacher.

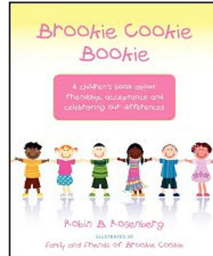


Bunny Bungalow

By Cynthia Rylant
Illustrated by Nancy Hyashi

A family of rabbits moves into a bungalow and makes it their own. There is not a word wasted in the perfectly crafted rhyming text that details the work and items that go into creating a bunny home.

The simple, sweet watercolor-and-pencil illustrations depict scenes such as the rabbits painting their house, one bunny with a green tail, and Father putting up a carrot weather vane as the others watch. This story evokes a cozy feeling that is just right for bedtime.

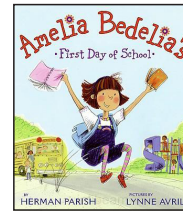


Brookie Cookie Bookie

By Robin B. Rosenberg

“Brookie Cookie Bookie: A children’s book about friendship, acceptance and celebrating our differences” is sure to bring smiles to the faces of small children as they are read to and relate to the pictures drawn by kids their own age. It’s large, colorful and the

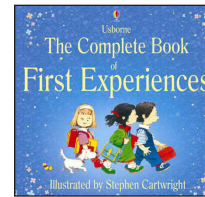
message is timeless. Readers will particularly enjoy the little rhymes on each page telling of another friend of Brook’s, the differences they have and what each child has in common. “Siobhan has a BIG family and mine’s very small but we both love family time and know it’s the most important time of all!”



Amelia Bedelia's First Day of School

By Herman Parish
Illustrated by Lynne Avril

Ordinary first grade happenings become extraordinary with Amelia Bedelia’s literal take on all things first grade. Readers will giggle over Amelia’s mishaps, and her genuine joy and eagerness may assuage first-day fears.



The Complete Book of First Experiences

By Anne Civardi
Illustrated by Stephen Cartwright

This book introduces all kinds of firsts to young kids – first trip to the doctor, bringing home a new baby for the first time, and the first day of school are amongst the topics covered. This could be an excellent book to have on hand to prepare children ahead of time for the big moments that are part of growing up.

- All from online reviews

RECIPES

Get out of the kitchen!

Summer is the time to get outside and get grilling. Here are some easy, fun recipes that even the pickiest of eaters will get behind.

Huli Huli Chicken

This Hawaiian style barbecue chicken is a crowd pleaser, and kids get a kick out of the name.
Makes 6-8 servings

For chicken:

- 2 whole chickens split
- 2 qts. water
- 2 c. soy sauce
- 6 cloves garlic minced
- 2 tbs. ginger minced
- 1 tsp. vegetable oil

For glaze:

- 18 oz. pineapple juice
- 1/4 c. soy sauce
- 1/4 c. brown sugar
- 1/4 c. ketchup
- 1/4 c. rice vinegar
- 4 garlic cloves minced
- 1 tbs. ginger minced
- 1 tbs. chili sauce



For marinade: Sauté garlic and ginger in the vegetable oil until fragrant. Submerge chicken in marinade let sit refrigerated 1-8 hours.

For glaze: Combine all ingredients and simmer until reduced by 1/2 until it can coat the spoon.

To cook: Remove chicken from marinade and pat dry. Place on indirect heat on grill skin side down. Cook 20-25 minutes then flip and go another 20-25 minutes until the thickest part of the thigh registers at least 165 degrees. Coat with glaze and serve.

Classic and Easy Gazpacho

- 1 cucumber
- 2 colored bell peppers
- 1/2 jalapeno pepper
- 4 plum tomatoes
- 1 red onion
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 c. tomato juice
- 1/4 c. wine vinegar (red or white or sherry)
- 1/4 c. good quality olive oil
- 1/2 tbs. salt
- 1 tsp. black pepper



Chop vegetables in a food processor until well processed, combine in a bowl with garlic, tomato juice, oil, vinegar, salt and pepper. Chill for at least an hour. Serve with good crusty bread and feel like you are in sunny Spain.

Grilled Summer Vegetables:

It’s easy to eat your veggies when they are summer ripe and sweetly charred from the grill. A quick marinade in balsamic vinegar, olive oil, salt, pepper and fresh herbs like thyme or rosemary will really make them sing. Slice zucchini and summer squash length-wise in 1/4-1/8 inch slices, coat them in marinade and place them directly on a very hot grill. Flip after 3-4 minutes when grill marks appear, cook on the other side. Season with salt and pepper. Toss them with a green salad, or eat as a side dish.