



gretchen's
house

So you want to know more about...

Parent Conferences

Making the Grade

Portfolios aren't just for artists and investors anymore! We assemble individual **portfolios** for every child at Gretchen's House because we believe it gives a more comprehensive picture of the child's development and interests.

Many adults get caught up in the "academic" milestones: when a child reads, when he can count to 100, when she understands analogies. These markers give us some information, but they don't tell the whole picture. Can your child comfortably approach peers? Ask for help? Solve problems? Express himself creatively? Complete tasks?

Our **portfolios** include:

- **Child Observation Record (COR) Assessment** summary. This is an objective record for each child, based on teacher's observations and organized by the key areas of development. The COR is based on the High/Scope approach and is a validated, research-based assessment tool that complements our curriculum.
- **Work samples** might be photos or child-drawn diagrams of science and math projects; artistic efforts; transcribed conversations with teachers, dictated stories, or, with older children, early writing or pre-writing activities and self-portraits.

- **Goals worksheet.** Prior to the conference, we ask parents to answer brief written questions about their child's strengths, developing skills, and any areas of concern you may have. At the conference, teachers and parents set **individual goals** for the child and discuss some ways to support those efforts at home and at the center.

At the end of the year, you'll receive a copy of your child's portfolio. It's an excellent way to share information with his or her next teachers. Parents also tell us portfolios become treasured mementos.

NAEYC on Partnering

Recent studies show that when families are involved in their children's education in positive ways, the children achieve higher grades and test scores, have better attendance at school, complete more homework, and demonstrate more positive attitudes and behavior. Reports also indicate that families who receive frequent and positive messages from teachers tend to become more involved in their children's education than do parents who do not receive this kind of communication.

One way to foster children's learning is through joint efforts involving both families and schools, where parents and teachers share responsibility for creating a working relationship that will help children succeed academically.

—from *Early Years Are Learning Years*, online at : www.naeyc.org

Further reading

- *The Measure of Our Success*,
by Marian Wright Edelman
- *The Academic Achievement Challenge: What Really Works in the Classroom?*
by Jeanne S. Chall

Ways We Communicate

At Gretchen's House we convey information about our curriculum and your child's development in a variety of formats:

Notes: Family group teachers write daily notes for infants and toddlers, which include basic sleep and feeding information as well as anecdotes. Preschool and kindergarten children receive weekly or bi-weekly notes that summarize the program events and address any on-going concerns.

Dry Erase Boards: Each program summarizes the day's activities and on-going discussion topics on a dry erase board located by the parent bulletin board or classroom entry. This is a great springboard for parents to initiate conversations about the things children see and do each day.

Curriculum Night: Each program holds a curriculum night in the fall. This is a hands-on experience which conveys in-depth information about program goals, interest activities, and expectations for behavior.

Occasional concerns: From time to time, teachers may phone or write a note to parents to mention minor concerns or respond to something a parent has initiated. Follow-up often includes some reading material from the Parent Library and an action plan.

Parent Conferences: All parents are strongly encouraged to attend a twenty-minute, individual conference each spring. Directors and parents may request conferences at other times of year when the need arises.

Frequently Asked Questions

My child seems to be slower at everything than the other kids. Should I be concerned? Children develop skills at different rates, and few children are "above average" at *everything*. Try looking for information to *disprove* your concern as well as *confirm* it. Ask your child's teacher for his or her opinion. Read Parent Library materials. Whenever you speak with a teacher or physician about developmental concerns, use concrete examples to illustrate your point, and ask anyone who expresses concerns (or dismisses them) to use concrete examples, as well. Lastly, remember that children may regress a bit before a developmental leap.

I wish there were more structure in my child's classroom. Giving children "structure" isn't limited to adhering to a strict schedule or having them do more teacher-directed, closed-end outcome activities. We provide structure by setting up our classroom spaces to encourage the kinds of behavior and exploration we want in each area; providing a natural, balanced, and consistent daily routine; using auditory and visual cues to signal transitions; and having consistent expectations for behavior. If you want your child to be doing a lot of worksheets or memorization, ours probably isn't the right program for you.

How can I get a sense of what my child should know? Our **Active Learning brochures** give a good summary of average skills at each age: 3, 6, 9, 12, 18,

24 months, and 3, 4, and 5 years of age. We can share information from the Michigan Department of Education on kindergarten readiness (also available on line), and we have information on expected development from the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Our **Parent Library** has a variety of good books on the subject as well.

My child has above-average intelligence and I don't want her to be stymied or held back by the group. Our activities provide a variety of levels of challenge and success for a range of skills. We also strive to support all areas of development: social, emotional, cognitive, and physical. Too much concentration on one skill area can lead to neglect of another. And we believe that children learn as much from each other (if not more!) than they do from adults. Our goal is for every child to achieve his or her own personal best...at a pace comfortable for them. Most children arrive at the same "place" academically by second grade. Mastery of social skills by school age is a better predictor of later academic success.

I want my child to be learning. Isn't this too much free play? Our programs offer a balance of structured and self-directed play, both indoors and out. Children are kinetic learners who, if confined for too long, may begin to behave disruptively due to excess energy or boredom.