



Three special services that add quality

By: Claire Bainer

When children come back to visit BlueSkies, they often talk about how much they loved being here when they were little. They loved playing and playing with so many interesting things to do and helpful teachers, and with so many other children learning and doing interesting things right along with them. Growing children need good food to eat and a calm friendly place to nap and opportunities to “do it themselves” and be independent and feel safe, loved and cared for to be able to take in new information and learn. One of the college text books I studied from was called *The Nursery School: a Human Relationship Laboratory*. While the text is long out of print, the human relationship laboratory is alive and well at BlueSkies. The alumni children visiting also share their memories with observations like “The yard is not as big as I remembered”, “I remember building with those big blocks”, and “look how little the potties are”! They talk about the food at school, too. Depending when they were going to school here certain meals stand out. The care and love that goes into our food service is part of the wonderful homey feeling we strive to create for children and families. When the first plans were being made for the children’s program we knew that our program, like a three legged stool, had to work for the children, the parents and the teachers.

For this reason we added some special services rarely found in other schools. They all strengthen the quality of care the children receive here:

One is that we have full time housekeepers, we buy and use our own green cleaning supplies and we have a gardener and maintenance man who keep the school working smoothly and looking nice in spite of the tremendous wear and tear it gets. We have 85 kids, 40 staff, and parents and delivery people on the move throughout the school 51 weeks out of the year...this is just a lot of constant and not always very gentle use. (By my count, the front gate opens and closes at least 600 times a day!) Time spent on housekeeping and food preparation in centers without any housekeeping support always changes the teacher to child ratio. Teacher to child ratios are set to reflect actual count of adults available to children. It is a law because care with fewer adults is not good for children. It is set by age because as children get older they can be more independent and need less adult help. If one teacher is pulled away from teaching to cook or do some housekeeping chores the actual ratios become much higher. For children with higher ratios of 1:9, a teacher stepping out to prepare lunch or put out cots leaves the co-teacher alone with the whole group. With babies the ratio might shift from 4 babies to 1 teacher to 8 babies with 1 teacher. Housekeeping staff keeps the ratio true through the transition times when children need the most individualization and support.

Two is hiring full time substitutes. We have three full time subs on site every day hired as full-time, year round employees. If you do the math you’ll see that with 38 employees each getting two paid weeks of vacation a year, we’ll have more teachers out than we have weeks available each year! We are not even adding in sick days. Our subs have the best job in the school as they

Upcoming Events

Friday, Feb 1

HEDCO House Meeting
6p.m. - 8p.m.

Weds, Feb 6

Parent Scholarship
Committee
6:15 p.m. - 7:45 p.m.

Monday, Feb 18

BlueSkies Closed for the
Presidents’ Day Holiday.

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Director's Report Cont...

get to know all the children and the schedules and the classrooms and the parents and the other teachers! They know the school and the children and families know them and they get to watch the children over the years.

Three is that we provide a full, healthful meal service with a cook and a cook's helper who prepare and shop and cook fresh, organic food on site and serve it up family-style.

It can be difficult to find child care center where menus are planned according to the children's needs. In most centers, parents of children (even babies) are expected to bring their food to school. These centers have an elementary school cafeteria feel at lunch. Teachers open containers, and heat things in the microwave, and children bargain for each other's food. Other centers hire a food service to deliver precooked food to the center. Teachers open cellophane wrapped pizza or hamburgers, open little cartons of milk and children eat off paper plates. These services primarily provide food for private elementary schools –they don't focus on food for younger children's needs. We want our children to be relaxed as they eat and we know that getting proper nutrition is important and so is easy digestion, just as understanding the benefits of the community eating together. Of course, independence and noticing others is also part of the "please pass and use your napkin" experience. We know our simple home cooked meals are best for children, but we had not realized quite how unique offering this in the child care center was. We want the food we serve to have a clean flavor so children can learn how things taste. There are no surprises; no chanterelles in the chicken-and rice. We are thoughtful about what the babies eat - pureed zucchini or chicken and rice in a broth does not need to be salted to satisfy our adult pallet in order to be yummy for a baby. We avoid salt, sugar or preservatives. The toddlers exercise their growing fine muscle skills and need for independence by picking up small perfectly-steamed carrot sticks that are just the right texture for chewing with a few molars. The nursery school children are given yogurt with their carrot sticks, so they can perform more sophisticated "dipping" rituals that reflect their ability to eat and be social at the same time. The rhythm of the week is established by the constancy of the menu; Monday, chicken and macaroni, Tuesday, quesadilla and beans, Wednesday, curry stew, Thursday, lentils and corn bread and Friday, tomato soup and grilled cheese.

As the children grow, the lessons change even as the food stays the same. In the beginning they learn to trust that their caregivers will be attentive to their needs and appropriately respond to requests for "more" or indications that "I'm done!" Children learn physical skills like drinking from an open cup, holding a utensil, picking up bits of food, sitting in a chair to eat. As the children join the two year old group, they learn to stand up when they finish and carefully carry plate and cup to the tray for the kitchen. They learn to become more tuned in to the other children's needs and learn that each child will get what s/he needs, even if it means waiting a minute. They also learn the courtesy of choosing from the plate held by the teacher without handling each offering before it makes it to your plate first!

Children start to serve themselves at two and a half. Food is served in small, wide-based containers that children can easily hold and pass. Each item has its own bowl so no one has to wait too long. Instead of relying on the teacher to dole out food appropriately they help each other by saying "I need some noodles, too!" or "I'm just getting some milk and then I'll pass it to you." Watching these little ones ladle their soup into their own little soup bowl is really something to see. They are so proud of how big they are and how delighted they are to do it themselves!



In the upper school where children are between 2 ½ and 5 ½, children are coached to keep track of a napkin during the meal, then notice if they have drips and use it to wipe their face and hands and put it in the trash when finished. Teachers help children notice and take just as much as they will eat and remind them that "serving" doesn't mean to empty the bowl onto your plate but to take what you need! Children learn to pass bowls and pitchers carefully to the next pair of waiting hands. By the Homeroom and Schoolroom, the children like to help each other. They know who is allergic to what and are supportive to those children. They wipe up their spills and learn to dole out enough peas so everyone will get some. The four and five year olds set the table for their lunch so they can wash up and sit down when story is done. As they get ready to go off to kindergarten they will learn to make their own sandwich, pack their lunch and go for a walk and eat in new places around the school. They even learn to manage the baggie in their paper sack.

Director's Report Cont...

Every classroom has a snack table with fruit and milk or water. After nap there is a more substantial snack. We are teaching children that they live in a world of abundance where there is plenty for all. This teaches peace and harmony and sharing better than any words can.

At all ages, the children are learning about the “social side” of eating. Even before verbal skills emerge, the children have a companionable experience as they see their age-mates eating the same things at the table; as the words begin to come out the children discuss what they eat, what they like and don't like, what they had for dinner yesterday, where they went on the weekend, etc. With the teacher facilitating the flow, the children learn that meals are a nice time to relax together and share both food and themselves.

Teachers, parents and children at BlueSkies are truly supported by our “Support Service” staff.

BlueSkies-isms

Parents often hear their children using phrases that they suspect they learned at BlueSkies. Each month's “BlueSkies-ism” will include a phrase the teachers use all the time at BlueSkies, and some context to help you use the phrase at home too.

“If you want to spit you can spit in the potty (or wastebasket)”.

This goes hand in hand with “If you need to shoot you can put your finger through the knothole in the fence and shoot there.” The goal is to allow the unwanted behavior yet make it so uninteresting that the child will choose to stop doing it. Standing by the toilet spitting isn't much fun so usually the spitting ends quickly; shooting also loses its excitement if you are standing at the fence shooting at no one, and not getting a reaction from anyone. Be creative; this technique works with lots of different kinds of limits.

Staff out in February

The following staff will be out this month:

- * Jennifer out 2/1-3/1
- * Ameena out 2/6-2/15
- * Maria V out 2/22 - 2/25
- * Hope out 2/27-3/1



comings & goings

Welcome!

Margot and André in the Baby House

Anya in the Wobblies, joining big brother Ethan

Assistant Teacher Claire Harper in Hedco
Co-Head Teacher Sally Zwain in the Homeroom

Farewell!

Khalil in the Todds

Things children say

Upon hearing a chatty three year old talking to his mother at pick up the teacher commented best not to believe everything you hear!

“How was your school day, dear?”
“Great! Teacher Ben caught a lobster and a crab and cooked them for lunch for us!”

Kids this age love to enliven conversations with interesting idea. Children under 7 are interested in language as a social tool to connect and relate and participate. The factual accuracy component is not of high value to their way of thinking.

Snapshot in the Wobblies

Learning what is Real, Sort of Real and Pretend

By: Claire Bainer

Arnie has been active on the indoor climber, especially interested in swinging his body down into the tunnel from the top of the low slide. Looking for a new place to play, he wanders over to the play kitchen, pops a piece of plastic “toast” in his mouth and chomps on it. Kendra looks up with interest from her book, stands and carefully places the book back on the shelf, and heads over to the kitchen as well. The teacher reminds Arnie that when he is finished with his “toast” he can put it in her apron pocket (the one for dirty tissues, and toys to be washed). Kendra picks up a cup and pretends to drink, saying “Kuh” to the teacher who responds “that’s your cup.” Arnie drops his “toast” into the sink and the teacher intercepts it as Kendra reaches for it; the teacher asks Arnie if he is finished, pockets the dirty piece, and tells Kendra “here’s a clean piece of toast for you, Kendra,” taking another off the shelf. Jacob joins the group, picking up a plastic banana and chewing on the end of it. Arnie has picked up a plastic cucumber to chew.

The Wobbly Walkers are in a highly sensory stage, with their mouths still a primary source of input (at the age of one month, a baby who has sucked an unseen bumpy or smooth pacifier will look longer at the type he has sucked!). One year olds with mouths full of emerging teeth are also constantly seeking relief from teething irritations. Thus the teacher offers a play kitchen full of sturdy plastic food that can double as chew toys, and keeps the play hygienic by constantly circulating chewed-on plastic “food” to the real kitchen for cleaning. She knows these children need to chew, and will chew either on toys or on other children, so she sets up an acceptable and interesting system for that to happen. In the next classroom, the Todds, there is no more “food” in the play kitchen. The children’s development now allows them to control their impulses a little more and pretend a little more. They are moving out of such a totally sensory stage, so the teachers know they are ready to learn how to use the toys in the play kitchen as symbols. The teachers “pre-sort” to help the children as they move into categorizing toys with a new level of understanding. If those children need to chew something, the teacher has teethers available. Rather than struggle to re-train children who have learned to use plastic food as something to chew on, they just don’t put it in the play kitchen, and focus on helping children learn to pretend to drink from a toy cup and eat from a toy plate. When they are a little older, in the nursery school, pretend food will be re-introduced in the dramatic play area and the children will be ready to use it symbolically.

