

LITTLE WONDERS: A PARENT-CHILD COOPERATIVE



2009-10 HANDBOOK

225 Tilton Avenue
San Mateo, California 94401
(650) 348-0736
www.littlewonders.org

*“Little Wonders is a fun place where a child’s
play becomes an opportunity to share and
explore parenting styles.”*

Little Wonders Handbook

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STRUCTURE OF THE CENTER

INTRODUCTION

Little Wonders, a Parent-Child Center, is a non-profit, non-sectarian nursery school, located in the Congregational Church, 225 Tilton Avenue, San Mateo, California 94401. We are a parent-run, self-supported, cooperative center where children and parents play together. Parents also have the opportunity to learn about child growth and development.

"Co-oping" is an exciting opportunity to grow and participate with your child, to support the school and be supported by it. Though it takes time and effort, the rewards are great. We hope you will enjoy the experience!

PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS

Each parent and child is unique. It is our goal to help you develop a parenting style appropriate for your family. We hope to enhance communication within the family, support you in your role as a parent, and meet specific needs of both children and parents. Our program provides the environment, materials and information to allow you and your child to learn and develop together. The program is structured to encourage educational, social, emotional, physical, and creative development for both you and your child.

Adults learn best in a safe environment where they can acquire new skills, refine them through trial and error and teach them to others. At Little Wonders we emphasize the importance of understanding ourselves along with our partners and children. With an understanding of temperament and personality styles, we can practice effective communication and realistic expectations and appreciate the uniqueness of each individual, which improves our family relationships and life.

Children learn and develop in their own way. They demonstrate their individual developmental process to us by showing us what they are interested in learning.

Pursuing their interests at their own pace and exploring their environment fully with all five senses is important for children to develop intellectually, emotionally, physically,

and socially.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors consists of the following officers: President, two Vice Presidents: Registrar and Liaison, Secretary, Treasurer, San Mateo Council Representative, Jobs Chairperson, Facilities Chairperson, Publicity Chairperson, Events Chairperson, and Development Chairperson. The Board members are elected in March and hold office from June 1 of each year until May 31 of the following year. Board meetings are held once a month and interested parents are welcome to attend at any time. Board meeting agendas and minutes are posted at the school each month.

STAFF

Our school employs a Director and a staff of well-qualified teachers. They hold either California Credentials issued by the State Department of Education or comparable Early Childhood Education (E.C.E.) units and/or experience.

DIRECTOR

Our Director, Mireille McKee, has been a Little Wonders teacher for 15 years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Studies and an Early Childhood Education Credential. She previously worked as a preschool teacher and facilitator for mothers' groups. She is responsible for developing an educational program in cooperation with the teachers, for communicating and interpreting the program to the Board and for providing continuity from year-to-year. The Director serves the Board as a reference person in matters of planning and organization, and also serves as a liaison for the Board, the Staff, and the Community. Mireille has office hours at Little Wonders for telephone consultation and personal appointments with parents.

BY-LAWS

The school's By-Laws are available at any time. They are in the file cabinet at the school and on our website, www.littlewonders.org.

SAN MATEO COUNCIL OF PARENT-PARTICIPATION NURSERY SCHOOLS

Little Wonders is an active member of the San Mateo Council of Parent-Participation Nursery Schools (SMCPPNS), a non-profit organization of 12 cooperative preschools on the Peninsula. Together, we organize events benefiting our nearly 1,300 families. You can find valuable information on the website, www.ccppns.org, including a list of member schools and information, as well as listing of professionals offering their services at a discount to our current and former families. The SMCPPNS hosts several events throughout the year: a Networking Night for all co-op Directors and Board Presidents, a Family Consultant Service evening with workshops on topics from "saving money for college" to "estate planning" and "speech and language therapy," and a "Week of the Young Child" family-oriented event. The San Mateo Council is a regional arm of the California Council, which hosts an annual, statewide convention specifically designed for parents, teachers, and directors of co-op schools.

CONSULTANT SERVICES

All Little Wonders parents, staff members and alumni are eligible to avail themselves of the professional services of a network of consultants coordinated by the San Mateo Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools. The consultants include psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, marriage, family and child counselors, speech therapists, and attorneys. Their services are available to Little Wonders families at a reduced rate. If you are in need of the services of any of these professionals, you will find more information on the council website www.ccppns.org and in the Consultant Services brochure available in your Orientation packet.

CLASSROOM PROGRAM

CLASS DESCRIPTION

We offer classes for parents of children from 8 months to two years, nine months as of September 1st of each year. All classes meet once a week for two hours. There are 30 classes per school year. We also offer a short session (7 weeks) during the summer.

Class sizes are limited depending upon age of the children. Each session is relatively unstructured. A wide variety of age-appropriate materials are available, and children are free to move indoors and outside, as their curiosity dictates. The teacher moves throughout the school, interacting and initiating activities. The children gather twice during the day, for a snack and for music and movement. The 8 to 20 month-olds (babies and younger toddlers) meet in the mornings or late afternoon. The older toddlers and 2's meet in the afternoon. All classes meet weekly.

CLASS TIME

The first week of the semester is an open format where each parent is responsible for his or her own child. If you are a parent attending with multiple children, we ask that you bring another adult for that first week to help with supervision. We allow this time together so that both parents and children will feel comfortable with the surroundings before starting our station/observation rotation. After the first week, you will serve as either a supervising parent or an observing parent during each class meeting.

Supervising Parent

As a supervising parent, you assist the children in an assigned area, such as the climber, sand play and/or water play, patio area, painting area, playdough table, house-keeping area (dolls, dress-up clothes), manipulative toys (puzzles, pegboards, blocks), food, art, or science. You demonstrate ways to use materials, intervene and model appropriate behavior when necessary, and make sure that all safety standards are observed. You will follow a schedule with daily assignments provided by the teacher. Two areas involve home preparation:

1. The Food parent provides a nutritious snack for the class. Snack time is an opportunity for children to experience different foods, with an emphasis on safe and healthful food. Please provide snacks that minimize use of sugar, processed foods, and food additives. Due to potential allergies, **we are a nut-free school**. In addition, foods -- especially round foods such as grapes -- must be cut into pieces of an appropriate size based on the age of the children in your class.
2. Teachers set up Art during first semester only. The second semester art parent not only supervises the art table, but also provides a simple art activity for the children. The teacher will prep the class on appropriate ideas, focusing on process- rather than product-oriented experiences.

Observing Parent

As an observing parent, you will observe and record activities of either your child or another child. The teacher's aim is to direct your attention toward the uniqueness as well as the similarities of children in a specific age group. Your observation will be based upon the area of child development discussed in class. For instance, you might observe motor coordinated activities, spatial needs, or interactions with others.

Observing parents meet in a 30-minute discussion group with the teacher after snack time. You may share your observations, gain information from the teacher and discuss items of concern. The discussion group provides a supportive atmosphere. The observation sheets may also be used for communication with the teacher (questions, comments, special concerns). The teacher will write comments on them and return them.

DAILY CLEAN-UP

Five parents stay after each class to clean up and replace equipment for the next class. Each parent participates in this clean up 6-8 times per year. Parents are asked to help each other so everyone leaves together. Parents are responsible for finding their own substitutes should they be absent for their clean-up.

CO-OPING RESPONSIBILITIES

PARTICIPATION

A positive experience for both parents and their children at Little Wonders depends upon parent participation. Your willingness to participate ensures the successful operation and growth of the school. Little Wonders is a non-profit parent cooperative. In an attempt to keep our fees low so that we are affordable to a diverse group of families, we rely on parents to do much of the work for which other non-co-operative schools must pay: registration, administration, finances, fundraising, maintenance and projects.

As part of this coop there are 4 things we require of our families. The first is classroom participation and was outlined in the previous section under class time. As stated there, parents participate in a station/observation rotation. As a station parent, we do require that parents interact with and assist the children that come through their stations. It is each parent's responsibility to find a replacement should they be unable to attend class when they are assigned to a station. We expect that parents will take this responsibility seriously and attend as consistently as possible and be focused on the children.

In addition to classroom participation, we require that families sign-up for a job involving a minimum of 15 hours per year, participate in one Saturday cleaning day per year (Super School Wash), and attend three night classes. All of these responsibilities are described in detail later in this section. The benefit of this participation to our center is great – we reap the donated talents of a variety of men and women and save thousands of dollars. The benefit to each family is a feeling of closeness with other families all working together for the benefit of their children.

Participation is for parents or family members only. Paid caregivers are always welcome to attend with you and your child, but not instead of the participating family member. Paid caregivers are allowed to come without you only three times per semester. T.B. clearance is required.

YEARLY JOB

Every family selects one job for the year. Each job consists of approximately 15-20 hours of work per school year. Sign ups take place during registration or during the summer before school begins. Examples of jobs are class liaisons, playdough makers, and fundraising committee members. We hope you will select a job that fits your time and talents. As a co-op, it is of great importance that you perform your yearly job. However, we do make exceptions, and you may choose to pay a \$350 Buyout Fee. We offer this buyout option to a maximum of 12 families per year. **If you fail to complete your job or leave the school prior to job completion, you will be charged \$175 for each semester or partial semester spent at Little Wonders.**

SUPER SCHOOL WASH

One time during the year, your class is responsible for a two-hour classroom clean-up. These super school washes occur monthly, typically on the first Saturday of the month from 1-3 pm. The specific date is assigned by class and is in your registration packet. All families who spend 6 weeks or more at Little Wonders are responsible to complete this requirement. These are wonderful opportunities to get to know your fellow class parents without the children around. If you are unable to join your class on the scheduled wash day, you may either reschedule within 60 days OR pay a \$100 Buyout Fee in lieu of completing the school wash. If, after 60 days, you have not arranged to complete a future wash, you will be sent an invoice for the \$100 buyout fee.

If you join the program mid-year, you are still required to complete a super school wash, even if your class has already completed their wash. Contact the Facilities Manager to arrange to attend one of the future washes. If you drop the program after November 1st, you are still required to complete a school wash or pay a \$100 Buyout Fee.

REQUIRED NIGHT CLASSES

There are **three required night meetings for parents**. The first is in September, an orientation meeting held at Little Wonders. The second is the All School Meeting held during the third week in October. The third is a Parent Education

Evening held in January. Information from these meetings provides the basis for the parent education program that continues throughout the year.

If you miss one of these three meetings (or the available make-up options) you will receive a call and/or letter from the school's Board President. If you miss two meetings, you will be asked to leave the school. Missing these meetings demonstrates a lack of understanding and respect for the Little Wonders co-oping based community.

ALL-SCHOOL MEETING

The Little Wonders By-Laws require that a parent from each family attend the all-school business meeting during the month of October.

FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

We support the high-quality of educational materials, personnel, and extended services in our center through a yearly fundraiser. Our fundraising efforts also include your participation in the eScrip program, Schoolpop.com, family restaurant nights, and "Keepsake Handprint Projects" and Tiles, as well as an annual auction and dinner dance. We hope that these programs will be enthusiastically supported.

OPTIONAL NIGHT CLASSES

Teachers present optional night classes throughout the year. Topics for these classes have been "The Preschool Decision", "Nutritious Cooking For and With Children", and "Double the Pleasure, Double the Fun" for parents of multiples. We also utilize the expertise of our parents who may be able to lead classes, such as "Speech and Language Acquisition" or "Kindergarten Readiness." All optional classes are offered to current families for free and to alumni if space is available and the topic is relevant. CPR classes are also offered throughout the year for a small fee.

FAMILY PAJAMA NIGHTS

Each class has a designated Pajama Night for the entire family. During this teacher-directed two hour class, all members of your Little Wonders family are invited to join the fun. We encourage siblings and extended family to attend.

PARENT - TEACHER CONFERENCES

Each family in the school is entitled to one half-hour private conference with their teacher during the year. When you wish a conference, please contact your teacher to arrange a time and place.

CENTER POLICIES

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance is necessary. It allows you and your child to benefit from the school and helps our program run smoothly. If you have to miss a class on a day when you are scheduled to supervise, you must find another parent to cover your station. Three make-up sessions are allowed for each parent per semester. With the teacher's permission, you may attend any of our other classes throughout the week. If you miss more than six classes, you will meet with the Director and Vice President/Registrar to re-evaluate your commitment to the school and co-oping.

HEALTH FORMS

We require that health forms be on file prior to the first day of school. These forms include the Emergency Medical Authorization and Parent's T.B. Clearance Forms. California law requires the **parent** attending class to have a current PPD tuberculosis test on file before school begins. A PPD form is required for an additional parent or family member who participates more than three times during the school year. ***THESE FORMS MUST BE ON FILE BEFORE YOUR FAMILY ATTENDS CLASS.***

ILLNESS

A sick child belongs at home. Here are guidelines to follow regarding illness:

1. A child must be fever-free for at least 48 hours prior to class.
2. A cold should be at least four days along, with no new symptoms appearing for at least 48 hours prior to class. Doctors say that at this point, the cold is usually no longer contagious.
3. Please report the outbreak of any communicable disease such as measles, chicken pox, etc., to the

school. Teachers will alert the classes via email and post at school.

4. If your child has allergies or other conditions, which produce symptoms that could be mistaken for an illness, please let your class members know - it may reduce worrying.
5. Vomiting and diarrhea are also indicators of potential viral infection, requiring four days since the last occurrence before returning to school.
6. Sick parents belong at home also!
7. Parents should always use their own good judgment as to whether their child is ready to return to class once these guidelines have been met.

SAFETY

Please be safety-conscious at school. All parents, whether on station or observation, are asked to remain watchful and helpful. When you are a supervising parent, please make sure you are responsible for your specified area. If you need to leave your area, ask another person to watch it for you.

Pay special attention to higher risk areas such as the climber or slide, and intervene whenever safety is in jeopardy. Prevent sand throwing, throwing of hard objects, biting, kicking, hitting, or pushing of children (the latter especially when in high places). Accidents are very rare; however, if an accident occurs, the teacher should be made aware of the situation, and it should be written up in our "Ouch Reports".

HAND WASHING

We ask that our parents and children wash their hands upon entering the school. You may wash hands with soap and water at either the outside or inside sinks. We encourage hand washing upon entering, prior to snack and upon leaving the facility in order to cut down on the spread of germs. Hand sanitizer may be used as an alternative.

STUDENT ACCIDENT INSURANCE

Little Wonders carries accident insurance for both the children and parents who attend class. Part of your non-refundable registration fee covers this cost. This insurance covers medical expenses of an insured person for any injury which occurs while the person is attending or participating in

any authorized school activity. The policy pays up to \$1,000 (with no deductible) of covered medical expenses. This program is used primarily to repay parents for any co-insurance or deductibles on their personal medical insurance plans.

The covered expenses include:

1. Treatment by a physician or surgeon
2. In or out-patient care in a hospital
3. Nursing care by a registered nurse
4. Emergency ambulance service

REGISTRATION AND FEES

Pre-enrollment for the new school year takes place in the spring. A non-refundable \$50 registration fee is required for each child. Classes fill up well in advance, so early enrollment is suggested to ensure a place in the class of your choice. Tuition is \$550 per year (\$800 for twins, \$950 for triplets); this includes a non-refundable deposit of \$135 (\$200 for twins, \$235 for triplets) due by June 1.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Little Wonders offers limited financial aid. If you would like to request financial aid for full or partial tuition, please request the Scholarship Guidelines. Arrangements can also be made for tuition payment according to an established payment plan. Scholarship Guidelines and Payment Plan Agreements can be requested by contacting registrar@littlewonders.org.

ADDING OR DROPPING A CLASS

If there is space in class, a new child may enter at any time. Tuition will be adjusted according to the date of entry into the program.

To drop a class, please contact the Vice President/Registrar and your teacher as soon as possible. Refunds will be based on the date the request is made to the Vice President/Registrar and will be paid on completion of all of your co-opping obligations, including your annual job and Super School Wash. **You will be required to complete a Drop Form to ensure that your commitments to the school have been fulfilled.** A prorated refund may be granted upon written request if dropping prior to March 1st. Your initial deposit of \$135 (\$200 twins, \$235 triplets), however, is non-refundable.

MATERNITY LEAVE

Mothers may take three weeks maternity leave. Usually your older child can continue at Little Wonders without interruption. Grandparents or family members are allowed to bring your child for a few weeks. In other instances, parents have brought new babies in front packs and carried on as usual in class. For the well being of the class, it is important that babies are **not** brought to class once they reach an age where they are more demanding of your attention, usually around three months.

CLOTHING - WEAR OLD CLOTHES!

Parents and children are most comfortable wearing clothes and shoes that may get wet, sandy, painted, glued, and spilled upon. Bring extra diapers and a change of clothes. Please mark all of your children's clothing.

VISITORS

Visitors are welcome at Little Wonders. Siblings may visit three times per year. Please check with your teacher for an appropriate time.

MAKE-UP CLASSES

Families are entitled to three make-ups per semester in another class. Parents are asked to email their teacher with make-up requests. The teacher of the class you plan to attend will respond as to availability. Other un-enrolled siblings may not attend make-ups.

PHOTOGRAPHS / VIDEO

From time to time, pictures or video of you and your child may be taken in class or at other Little Wonders' functions. These images may be used internally for the benefit of the Little Wonders community, in such forms as a yearbook, placemat, newsletter, or posted on the bulletin boards in the classroom. In addition, images of you or your child may be used to promote Little Wonders to potential new families or to the community at large, in such forms as flyers, promotional videos, or on the Little Wonders website. Last names will be omitted from materials intended for public use. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, contact the Publicity Chair at publicity@littlewonders.org. If you have any objection to Little Wonders' use of any such images, you must notify

the Publicity Chair and the Director in writing in a timely manner. All reasonable efforts will be used to accommodate your concerns.

GRIEVANCES

If you are seriously bothered by something that involves a parent, teacher or Board member at Little Wonders, please talk to the person involved and see if you are able to resolve it together. If you cannot do so successfully, write down your grievance and meet again with the person involved. If the problem has not been resolved, talk to your teacher, the Director, or a Board Member for assistance in reaching a resolution. The ability to confront and successfully resolve differences is a learned skill. This skill is important in your success as a parent and must be modeled for your children.

CHILDREN - OUR INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

The school is made up of parents, children, and teachers, and is a changing, evolving unit that affects us all. We encourage your ideas and suggestions to make our school even more enjoyable. Parent participation takes time, but look what you gain! While your child is developing skills and socialization, you too are increasing your parenting skills and sharing your child's pre-school world! We hope you have a good year!

"Little Wonders is a non-profit, non-sectarian, non-discriminatory education center. We welcome families from all cultures, races, religions, socio-economic backgrounds, and physically challenged walks of life."

Member in Good Standing Clause

You must fulfill all of your co-oping obligations within the requirements and time identified. These obligations include:

- Completing Annual Job
- Attending three Mandatory Parent-only Night Classes, including Orientation, All School Meeting and Class in January
- Regular attendance in class
- Completing Super School Wash
- Submitting Emergency Medical Authorization
- Submitting Parent's T.B. Clearance Form for any participating parent or family member attending more than three classes during the year
- Making tuition payment

Failure to meet one or more of these co-oping obligations will result in losing your co-oping benefits. These benefits include class attendance, all optional night classes, social events, teacher-parent conferences, and priority enrollment for future programs.