

Carnegie Mellon University Children's School April 2020 Family Newsletter

Stronger Together – We Are All Helpers!!

The global coronavirus pandemic and related social-distancing protocols, closure of schools and businesses, and stay-at-home orders have created a stressful situation for everyone in the Children's School learning community. Our fear, anxiety, sadness, and grief for all the losses can be overwhelming at times, even for young children. At times like these, educators remember Fred Rogers saying, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" So we look for the helpers.

For example, in our community, Stacy Lane (Drake, AM 3's) redirected the resources of her Central Outreach Wellness Center to lead the coronavirus testing in Allegheny County. Kenny Lam (Kurtis, AM 4's) uses his engineering skills to build medical devices to help people's breathing; Lysie Campbell (Dylan, AM 4's) founded Friends.Help to connect people who need work with people who need help; and Lisa Strauch (Mollie, AM 3's) is doing remote therapy sessions with her clients, many of whom need extra support now. Children's School educators are helping to ease the disappointment of our school closure by connecting with children and families. They are recording stories and songs, as well as modeling activities that children can do at home. Our daily emails are full of age appropriate ideas, and all of our materials are being shared broadly via our web site.

We are all helping keep ourselves and others safe by following the recommended practices, especially for handwashing, and by caring for our families and friends. There are many ways that children can be involved as helpers by sending pictures and notes to elderly relatives and neighbors or communicating by phone or digitally. Children can also help their friends feel connected by having virtual playdates or sharing ideas for games and activities. Please share your stories of helping with Miss Drash (adrash@andrew.cmu.edu) so we can highlight them in the May newsletter.



April Dates:

Though the Children's School campus is closed, remote learning continues!

April 13th – 17th Week of the Young Child – Watch for Special Daily Activity Ideas

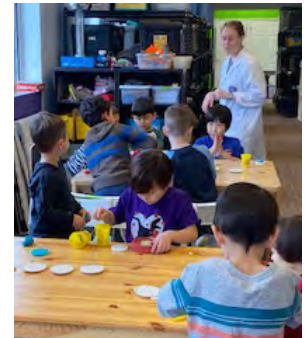
April 17th to 24th Parent / Teacher Conferences
(arranged by educators to fit family schedules)

April 20th to 24th Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day All Week!



Family Social Organization Fun in February

On Friday, February 28th, ten students gathered at **Mad Science** for a series of experiments and lots of learning. The program began with studying animal footprints and how scientists track and study those animals. Students were able to make their own plaster molds of fox footprints. Scientist Meg taught students about different habitats in the ocean. Students were asked to sort creatures based on their homes, including shore, reefs, and deep sea. Thank you to everyone who attended!



Week of the Young Child

NAEYC (The National Association for the Education of Young Children) designates the week of April 13th to 17th as the Week of the Young Child. NAEYC encourages early childhood communities to organize projects and events that create broad visibility and support for the importance of the early years as a way of sharing the responsibility of ensuring the well-being of diverse children and families. As a laboratory school affiliated with a Psychology Department, we contribute to the success of all young children by facilitating high quality research, offering a model program that serves as an example for practitioners and as a field placement site for pre-service teachers, and offering seminars and workshops as professional development for our colleagues.

Since we are all working and learning remotely this month, Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Myers are preparing a special series of activity suggestions to align with NAEYC's Music Monday, Tasty Tuesday, Work Together Wednesday, Artsy Thursday and Family Friday. We'll collect photos of our experiences to compile for sharing with our national early childhood colleagues.



50th Anniversary of Earth Day



Wednesday, April 22nd is the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. Because of the global health crisis, Earth Day is going digital around the world and at the Children's School. Earth Day organizers seek to mobilize citizens of the world for the creativity, innovation, ambition, and bravery that we need to meet our climate crisis and seize the enormous opportunities of a zero-carbon future.

Miss Drash and Mrs. Mack are preparing a series of activity suggestions in honor of our Planet Earth theme so that we can celebrate our home planet all week.

2020-2021 Enrollment Updates

We currently have 23 children registered for the Kindergarten (with 2 pending acceptances), 27 children registered in the 4's program (about equally divided between the 1:00pm and the 2:30pm dismissal), and 23 children registered in the 3's Program (about 2/3 dismissing at 1:00pm and 1/3 at 2:30pm). All of our programs also have wait lists, so we will work through them if anyone's plans change. Thank you for your referrals to family and friends! Mrs. Rosenblum and Mrs. Myers are happy to dialogue with prospective families now and to offer tours when school reopens.

Summer Camp Enrollment: Bugs!!

We are still registering children for our mixed age June Summer Camp, weekdays from June 1st to 26th from 9 am to 1 pm with as much outdoor time as weather permits. This year's camp theme is *Bugs* and will be taught by Mr. Allen, Mrs. Bird, Miss Dzina, Mrs. Loomis, Mrs. Mack, Mrs. Opferman, and Mr. Salinetto. You can register your child for one, two, three or four weeks. Please contact Maggie Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu if you would like reserve a space for your child. No deposit is required until we are sure that CMU's campus will be open to us in June.

Partial Tuition Refund

We recognize that the unprecedented closure of the Children's School for the second half of the spring semester has created a significant burden on families, many of whom must now care for and educate their children while adjusting to remote work. Our staff is working remotely too, so that they can provide developmentally appropriate suggestions for families and stay connected with the children virtually. Nonetheless, we are offering families a 75% refund on the tuition they have paid for the second half of the semester. Families may also choose to donate their refund to the school and, of course, receive a tax receipt for their donation. Please contact Maggie Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu to let her know which option you choose, or whether you want to arrange some combination of refund and donation.

For those choosing refunds, CMU's campus closure has added several complications. First, we need to be sure that all the incoming installment payments by mail have been processed so that we know how much each family has paid. Second, the university is not processing any paper checks for refunds at this time, so all families requesting refunds will need to complete an electronic payment request form so that the refund can be deposited directly into your bank account. We are currently arranging the details of these transactions with the accounting department, so you can expect an email soon with specific directions. We appreciate your patience with the process.

Year End Celebration

As soon as we learn of CMU's plans for re-opening the campus, we will schedule a time to host our annual **Kindergarten Graduation Ceremony** and **Year-End Celebration Picnic** for all Children's School families. Watch for plans and volunteer opportunities from Maggie Rosenblum (rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu) and Beth Myers (ewmyers@andrew.cmu.edu).

Educators Learning at Home

Children's School educators are all working from home to learn new approaches for providing support for children and families during this challenging separation from our regular school context. We decided to have a little fun at our first ever whole staff Zoom meeting by each wearing a hat.



All of our families have been receiving both whole school email updates and daily suggestions for at home learning from their children's teachers. If you want to access all of the different resources our team is developing, please check the Children's School web site. You'll see a message on the home page with a link to the resources, where you can then connect by age. Coming soon, there will be a way to find the resources by type, such as songs, stories, outdoor activities, etc.

Coronavirus Pandemic Closure:

Due to the government social-distancing and stay-at-home orders, as well as CMU's decisions to move instruction online and close campus, the Children's School closed on March 16th and will remain closed for the rest of the Spring 2020 semester. Our educators are supporting young children and families with a variety of resources to promote new routines, continued connections, and broad learning opportunities.

Young Children at Home During Coronavirus Closures:

We miss all of the Children's School children and families being together in Margaret Morrison Carnegie Hall, and we welcome hearing from you so that we can stay connected and support each other. We hope that these resources will help families while we all do our part to help slow the community spread of the coronavirus.

Learning at Home

[Preschool 3's](#)

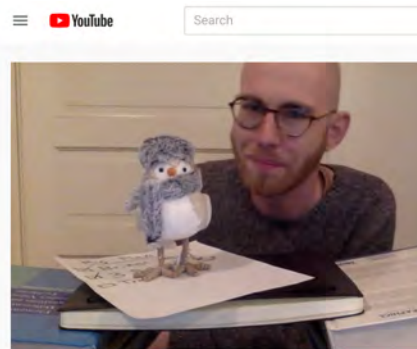
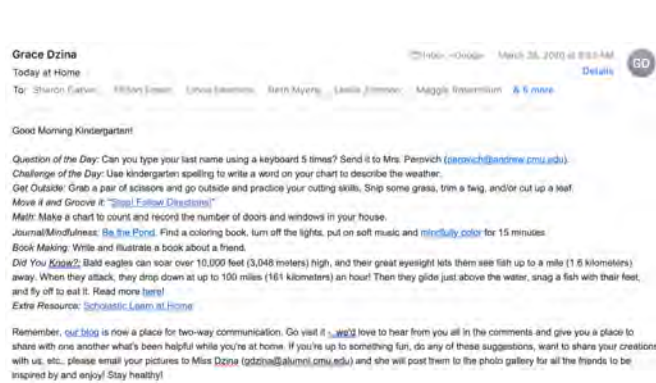
[Preschool 4's](#)

[Kindergartners](#)

[Engaging in Play
Every Day \(For
Children 2-6\)](#)

Classes Staying Connected

While following the government's physical distancing guidelines, Children's School educators aim to stay socially connected with their groups in a variety of different ways. You'll see daily activity ideas by email, teacher made videos (and children watching them at home), and Zoom class visits here, but we're also connecting in individual ways. Please feel free to talk with your children's teachers or with any of our administrators to help us tailor the approach to your unique situation. We appreciate all your words of encouragement and your suggestions for improvement as we continue to strengthen our strategies for facilitating routines, relationships, and learning for the coming weeks.



Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day

Though Carnegie Mellon University's "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day", originally scheduled for April 23rd, has been canceled, many of our families are now living the reality of mixing work and home lives because of our new remote work realities. Though every family's situation is unique, here are a few tips for managing work from home with young children.



- Talk with your child about the work that you do from home and let them see you doing it. Most young children do not have a concept of adult jobs, so it's helpful for them to envision you working and know that you need quiet and no interruptions. One parent shared that her daughter called the preschool Zoom chats, "a meeting with colleagues" and that she then separated more easily when it was time for mom to have a call.
- Establish a routine for the whole family. Children younger than age 8 cannot manage their own schedules, organize their activities, etc., so they will need significant adult guidance to participate in the activities that their teachers suggest. Families with two adults working from home benefit from a clear schedule of which adult is responsible for the children when, so that the other adult can get uninterrupted work time. Some of our families are shifting work hours to early morning or evening while children are sleeping or engaging in their waking and bedtime routines. Others are having one parent decrease hours on weekdays and increase them on the weekend, while the other does the reverse. Clear boundaries for which parent is available to the children at what times keep the expectations clear. We've also heard that families are enjoying mealtimes, excursions, etc. together, so be sure to plan break times when everyone can be together with no one working.
- Encourage children to play independently or with siblings for increasingly long periods of time by providing activities in safe spaces that do not require adult supervision. Here's where the open-ended materials such as blocks, playdough, dramatic play, etc. can be very useful. Since we now know that physical distancing in our community will last for at least another month, families might want to use the school strategy of rotating materials so that children do not have access to everything all the time. Also, changing the combination of materials or taking indoor things outside can renew interest in materials. Remember that the opportunities we suggest are just that – suggestions – and not requirements, so use as much or as little as you wish.

We're enjoying seeing photos of what our children and families are doing at home, so please feel free to share with us so that we can share with others in your group. The educators are posting families' photos in the protected part of their web sites so everyone in their groups can be inspired!

At Home with a Child with Extra Needs

Contributed by Beth Myers

After the whirlwind of recent weeks, we are adjusting to a new normal. The Children's School community is diverse in many ways, but we are all deeply invested in the early childhood experience as educators or parents, and often both. Some of our families include people with extra needs, and, during this time, I have been thinking about those families as I move through my days at home.

While my girls (13 and 10) are making good use of their 'distance learning' time reading, writing, drawing, playing music, and playing safely outside, my son (15) has spent much of his time standing

in our entry way asking for “shoes.” William has approximately 30 - 40 clear communicative words or phrases. “Shoes” is super clear, and it means ‘Let’s go!’

Like many children of all ages, but especially children with limited communication skills or children with Autism Spectrum Disorders or other developmental disabilities, **schedule** is the essential structure to the day. For my son, the predictability of a consistent schedule (waking, eating, going to school, coming home) is the solace in a world filled with a shortage of personal control related to his challenges in communicating basic needs and desires.

Consider what happens when your own carefully orchestrated routine disappears. You do what most of us are inclined to do, whether you have the energy or not; you push through the disappointment and formulate a new routine. If your child is anything like my son, he will first become upset by change and initially fight any new variations to schedules. This resistance reminds me that I should mix things up more! But, with enough repetition and familiar cues, routine begins to form. With routine comes predictability. For many children, ultimately, comfort is found in the new routine.

Here are a few ideas to consider as you establish your new normal:

You can do it! Start a new routine.

-One effective strategy for creating a new routine is to build from the one you have established. Think about the *times of day* and the *sequence of activities* to which your family is accustomed. Can you extend times in the same sequence? For example, we are giving ourselves more time in the morning to get up and go. Rather than being out the door at 7:30, we get up at 8:30 and take our time through breakfast and getting dressed.

-If you have to adjust to a totally new routine, try to do it in stages and use consistent words and cues when talking about activities. If you have already found yourself in the throes of a big change in daily schedule, try your best to stay consistent in the new sequence, and you will find that your pattern can create that new routine.

Use consistent language and cues.

-This suggestion takes forethought. What words or equipment are you going to use for an outing? In what part of the routine do you introduce or use these? For example, we use a specific pair of shoes to indicate to our son that we are going to the woods. In the same way some parents would say, “we are going to the woods for a walk, let’s put on your (hiking) boots”, we are saying the same thing by offering a particular pair of shoes. We present the shoes when we are all packed and ready to go, so the last step is to get William ready!

Vary the experience within the structure.

-We take a family outing every weekday around the same time regardless of weather. We like to vary the activity if we can. Sometimes, we can walk or ride wheels through the woods & neighborhood. If the weather is too wet or cold, we just get in the car go for a ride! We play music, have a morning snack and talk about what we see out the window. Either way, the sequence of the routine remains the same.

Make time to connect.

-Because your children are used to being around many other children and educators for some time during the day, they may be missing social interactions with peers. For some, social interactions can be challenging or uncomfortable, but those connections are still important. Even if your child has not asked about his or her friends, take some time to share pictures of peers and teachers.

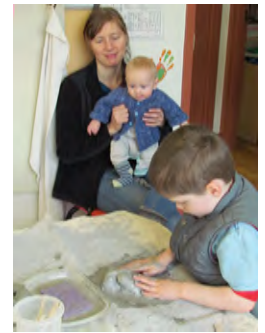
“Planet Earth” Family Festival

On Thursday, March 5th, about 225 Children's School family members celebrated our whole school unit at our **Planet Earth** Family Festival. Families enjoyed building and telling stories with rocks in the Blue Room and creating “pet rocks” in the Red Room. In the Green Room, everyone got to investigate small pebbles in the sensory table and explore building with varied blocks on earthquake tables to test the stability of their structures. Children could make paper volcanos and play the lava movement game, as well as visit the kitchen to simulate a volcano eruption.



More Exploring Planet Earth

At the Family Festival, the Reflection Garden had a rock scavenger hunt with the “prize” being the opportunity to have adult family members crack open a geode to find the crystals inside. The Office Suite encouraged making pictographs, i.e., “cave painting”, on stone slates and petroglyphs by scratching with small rocks on special paper to create designs. The Make Shop was a clay sculpting studio for families, and everyone could create fossil imprints. The Kindergarten was converted into a Rock Museum for the event so that families could investigate rocks with scales and magnifying glasses of various types, as well as exploring magnetism and viewing slides of the unit activities.



Family Spotlight: Music is Always Playing

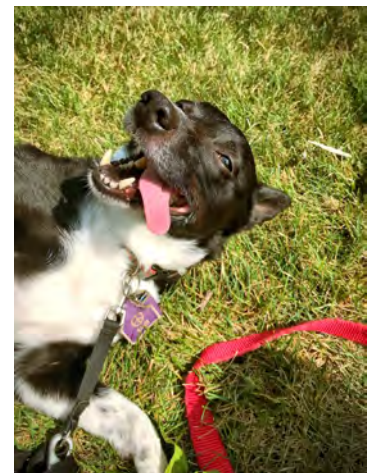
Hello! Hello! We are the Sabol Family - Jim, Emily, Norah (4.5), and our dog Lucy (13). Emily is a lifelong Pittsburgher and has only lived elsewhere for undergraduate (Indiana University, Bloomington) and graduate school (Michigan State) where she studied Developmental Psychology and Child Development. Jim was born and raised in Erie, PA; but at this point, he is an honorary Pittsburgher. He has lived here for well over a decade since attending the University of Pittsburgh, where he studied Chemical Engineering.



Before becoming a stay-at-home mom when Norah was born in 2015, Emily worked in academic research as a research assistant and project coordinator at IU, MSU, and Pitt. After that, Emily worked as a program coordinator at the Pittsburgh Holocaust Center. Jim currently works as a project manager at Equitrans Midstream. When he is not working, he is cheering for the Pens, playing the guitar and banjo, reading, attending a concert, and immersing Norah in the world of music. Music is always playing at the Sabol house. Emily enjoys getting together with friends, reading, gardening, taking walks, and creating with Norah. Norah loves dramatic play, music, spending time outside, playing with her grandparents, baking anything sweet, reading, being a big cousin to baby Hadley, and, most currently, the world of Harry Potter.



Since she was a baby, Norah has had a lot of fun going to some of the same places that Emily visited as a child, like the Carnegie Library in Squirrel Hill, Gymkhana at the Factory, Blue Slide Park, the Carnegie Science Center, Phipps, and Kennywood. More recently, our family moved to Peters Township in the South Hills where we have been enjoying playing in our backyard, gardening, swimming, taking walks, and exploring new places to eat and play. Lucy loves having so much space to explore and often runs around with the energy of a puppy.



This is Norah's first year at the Children's School and we feel extremely lucky to be here. She is currently in the AM 4's Green Room with Mrs. Bird and Mr. Allen. We wholeheartedly appreciate the daily kindness, the play-based approach, the evidenced-based practices, and the wonderful outdoor spaces that Norah and the rest of the children enjoy on a regular basis. We have seen Norah thrive in many meaningful ways since starting in the fall. We look forward to the rest of our time in the Green Room and next year in Kindergarten.

Undergraduate Spotlight

CMU's undergraduates are also all doing their coursework remotely. Justin is hunkered down in Philadelphia, Kirman is doing well, Mia is finally home in Japan, and Julia is making playdough towers during her remote classes. Stewart is getting a little cabin fever in North Carolina but optimistically applying for summer internships, and Angelica finds herself actually enjoying time with her family, especially family meals. Madeline finds the new learning experience tough, but she is doing great. Erika is home in Southern California with her twin sister and is enjoying her online classes. Summer is staying busy with classes, cooking, and crafting; her desk overlooks the street, so she watches the dogs being walked while doing her online classes. Shalaya is also in Philadelphia and really looking forward to working with us again in the fall.

You may be concerned about the students' loss of income from their work with us since they must still pay for their educational expenses. CMU has directed that students without remote work to do for their campus employers will still be paid 75% of what they would have earned.

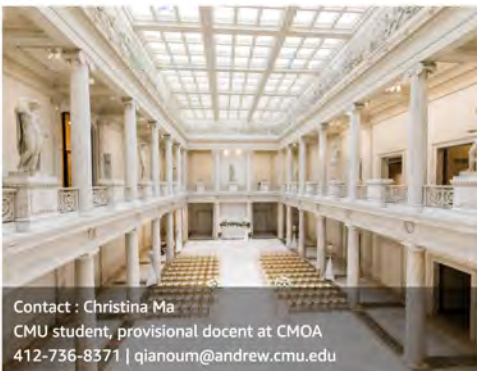
Research Spotlight

Research with child subjects is also on hiatus at the Children's School during the coronavirus outbreak, so the research teams are working remotely on data analysis, report writing, and preparation for future studies related to child development and education.

Carnegie Museum of Art Website Study



Help improve the user experiences of CMOA's website for educators and caregivers with CMU researchers!



Contact : Christina Ma
CMU student, provisional docent at CMOA
412-736-8371 | qianoum@andrew.cmu.edu

**Carnegie
Mellon
University**

Scan or Use the Link
to Take a Survey:
shorturl.at/MNVX4



Christina Ma, a CMU sophomore and a provisional docent at the Carnegie Museum of Art (CMOA), is conducting a study to improve CMOA's website for educators and caregivers. Her original plan was to survey and interview parents and educators who were bringing their children or classes to the museum. At present the CMOA is closed for the foreseeable future, Christina has gotten permission to invite Children's School parents and educators to participate instead.

Parents and educators interested in helping Christina complete her study while working remotely could take a 15-minute unpaid online study and/or schedule a paid online user interview. You can take the survey at the link below. Please contact Christina if you have any questions 412-736-8371 or (qianoum@andrew.cmu.edu).

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc-4nfWgeIM3Mkdcg61xWg44WPMDdeC7woNEf3plf6Uvyy6Hg/viewform>

Director's Corner: Importance of Support



If we've learned nothing else in the past few weeks, it is the importance of support. The World Health Organization has even changed their recommendations for "social distancing" to "physical distancing" in recent days because the original phrasing did not acknowledge the need for maintaining social connections despite the necessity for physical separation during the global coronavirus pandemic.

Learning and working at home may inadvertently help both families and educators to enact the recommendations from the first few articles in this series on ways to prepare young innovators to improve life on earth for their own and future generations. I have recommended allowing children to have unstructured time for playful exploration in open-ended contexts with many choices among acceptable alternatives as a way of encouraging the originality and iterative design thinking characteristic of innovators. Indeed, the closure of schools, extra-curricular activities, and community events has given us all more choices and time than we may know how to handle. That dilemma is why adult support, which educators call "scaffolding", is so essential.

Scaffolding takes children's play to the next level by helping them go from what they already know to what they could know. By modeling a skill, giving hints or asking provocative questions, and then gradually reducing the coaching provided so that children are increasingly independent, adults create a bridge to new levels of skill that are currently just beyond the child's reach.

- **Observe First**: Effective scaffolding starts with carefully observing the children's play to determine what is working well and where they are experiencing frustration or missing opportunities to extend.
- **Hint, Hint**: Sometimes all children need is a simple question or verbal prompt to further their thinking. "Tell me about your idea. What do you need to make it work (or work better)? I wonder what would happen if ... What else could you do? What would you like to do next?" Hints can also take the form of a photograph (e.g., a building photo to encourage more complex building, a mirror to encourage a more representational self-portrait), or a new material or tool (e.g., adding animals, people or vehicles to the set of blocks to encourage children to start building enclosures rather than just stacking or introducing thin markers to afford more detailed drawing).
- **Show & Tell**: When children express interest in learning something entirely new or well beyond their current ability level, adults can start with modeling the process, making the component skills clear by emphasizing the steps and the thought process clear by "thinking aloud". Telling the steps in this way also gives the adult opportunities to verbalize decisions to be made, options considered and rejected, or reflection on mistakes that gives ideas for what to try next.
- **Practice & Reflect**: Most skills take significant practice to master, so children need multiple opportunities to practice them. Watch for when children's progress over multiple sessions seems stalled and frustration begins to build. That's a good time to scaffold children's reflection on what they imagine but cannot yet enact (i.e., what they envision but cannot build or draw). Children are most motivated to persist and to stretch when they set the goals for learning themselves, so follow their lead as you decide what scaffolding to provide.

Throughout the process, notice that you can scaffold the emotion management and social interaction as much as the cognitive and physical skills. The innovators who are helping our society deal with the current pandemic need a broad range of skills to bring their ideas to fruition and functionality!