Director’s Corner: Facilitating Physical Capabilities

The Children's School’s "developmental goals" for physical capabilities, including health and safety, focus our program design on offering diverse opportunities for children to strengthen their bodies while actively learning indoors and out. By emphasizing the ways we purposefully invite productive and creative movement in safe contexts, I aim to encourage families to collaborate with us to promote healthy and active lifestyles at home, at school, and in the community.

Physical Capabilities / Health & Safety - giving children opportunities to use their growing bodies in safe ways to develop small and large motor skills, coordination, and healthy living habits.

Our intentional planning for young children’s motor development includes both small (fine) and large (gross) motor skills. Small motor skill building includes offering a wide range of activities that require eye-hand coordination (e.g., puzzles, blocks, beads, pegs), use of tools for real tasks (e.g., drawing, writing, cutting, woodworking, cooking, sewing, and using computers), and coordinated hand motions involving clapping, tracing, folding, etc. Large motor skill development includes strengthening leg & foot skills (e.g., balancing, walking, marching, running, hopping, etc.), arm & hand skills with varied balls (e.g., throwing, catching, rolling, bouncing, etc.), and coordinated movements of both arms & legs (e.g., riding a tricycle, pulling a wagon, climbing, jumping rope, doing exercises, etc.). For all movements, we aim for sufficient practice to increase coordination, strength, and body control. The specific concepts and skills that we teach about health and safety include nutritious food choices, effective hygiene habits, appropriate waste disposal and recycling, and consistent use of safety procedures and equipment (e.g., crossing the street, emergency drills, wearing safety goggles, etc.).

As with the other developmental domains, we combine modeling, explicit instruction, and coaching throughout the individualized process for each child, and we encourage initiative, attention, concentration, planning, persistence, acceptance of mistakes as part of learning, and the value of multiple strategies and solutions to movement problems.

For every theme, we develop related activities in each of the learning centers so that children have novel materials, projects, games, and dramatic play opportunities to practice their developing skills while learning about the topic of study. Our recent whole school theme of Building involved a wonderful variety of small and large building materials and incentive for learning appropriate body control so that the children could build safely without their structures falling.

You might be surprised to learn how much mathematics is involved in movement. We count movements and arrange movements in patterns, particularly when rhythm and dance are involved. We can move our bodies to create shapes and explore ways to move in, out, under, over, and around our friends or objects in our environment. We can measure our movement frequency, speed, distance, etc. and graph these measurements to monitor our progress over time. There is also math involved in many of our health and safety practices, such as using the food pyramid, washing our hands for a certain length of time, and sorting learning materials at clean up time.

Families can enhance everyone’s physical development by making active, healthy, and safe choices on a daily basis, as well as by discussing options with the children. Many household tasks involve exercising small and large muscles, so have fun cooking, cleaning, and doing yardwork together!