Director’s Corner: Health & Safety

The NAEYC standards for Health and Physical Environment include detailed quality specifications for promoting the nutrition and health of children, protecting children and staff from injury and illness, and providing a safe and healthy physical environment. Basically, the standards advocate designing welcoming, accessible, and developmentally-appropriate indoor and outdoor environments, with sufficient space for the number of children (35 sq. ft. indoors, 75 sq. ft. outdoors), safe and well-maintained equipment, materials, and furnishings, adequate supervision by sight and sound, clear, ADA accessible pathways, and secure boundaries, with access to safe drinking water and adequate toileting facilities and protection from environmental hazards ranging from extreme temperature and harmful sun exposure, to insects, smoke, pollution, asbestos, lead, etc. NAEYC also advocates designing environments for children and adults that are aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, naturally lighted, and well-ventilated, with spaces designated for individual belongings and clearly arranged for individual, small group, and whole group interactions.

- Best practices in these aspects of early childhood education begin with training, which we provide for all of our staff members, plus as many substitute teachers and support staff as are available to attend. Each year, we provide Pediatric First Aid / CPR training, including “standard precautions” regarding bloodborne pathogens, the “5 Rights of Medication Administration”, and “SafeServ” food safety training. Through the Environmental Health and Safety Department, Carnegie Mellon also provides our annual Fire Safety training and consultation any time we have questions or concerns.

- NAEYC also requires that we contract with health, nutrition, and playground safety consultants who periodically observe our facilities and practices to determine whether we are following the recommendations for record-keeping, maintaining first aid and emergency supplies, handwashing & diapering procedures, cleaning and sanitation frequency, choking prevention, managing allergies and other special medical conditions, etc. and to make recommendations for improvement.

- Because we are part of the university community, Carnegie Mellon provides our security, building maintenance, cleaning, grounds-keeping, routine safety checks, hazard responses (e.g., pest management, unusual smell investigation, etc.). Though we pay for renovations to our kitchen and playground, the project management, bidding, etc. goes through the university Facilities Management Services department, and the insurance and liability policies are maintained by the university.

- On our Administrative Team, Miss Hancock serves as the primary liaison with the trainers, consultants, and university personnel for all aspects of meeting the Health and Physical Environment standards. Our teaching teams focus on the daily classroom procedures for health and safety, and they are also responsible for designing the classroom environment with varied materials that are organized for children’s independent use, created and rotated to align with our thematic studies, and adapted to the children’s interests and developmental levels.

In all of these ways, we seek to provide an effective learning environment as a context for all of the relationships, teaching, curriculum and assessment, etc. that I have described in prior articles this year. When classes are in session, much of this proactive preparation and intentional design is invisible, but it is essential to our quality program. Thanks to all who support our efforts!