

LEAP Preschool

Learning Experiences: an Alternative Program for Preschoolers and Parents



The LEAP Philosophy

The Watson Institute's LEAP Preschool provides high quality early intervention services to preschool children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder and their typically developing peers. It reflects a naturalistic, inclusive developmental approach for teaching children in an early childhood environment. This approach focuses on enhancing the skills of children with autism through interaction and play with typically-developing peers. The LEAP model is one of the most extensively validated intervention programs in early childhood special education history.

The LEAP Preschool

To best meet the needs of children with autism, the preschool curriculum is supplemented with learning activities and instructional strategies specifically designed to concentrate on the development of functional skills, independent play, social interaction, pre-academics, language skills and adaptive behavior. We use naturalistic or activity based teaching strategies in our inclusive programs and collaborate with community preschools to provide young children with autism the opportunity to receive their education in a typical setting. Sessions are 2 1/2 hours long, 5 days a week in the morning or afternoon, 11 months a year.

Our Sharpsburg building houses 3 LEAP classrooms each consisting of 4 children with autism and 8 typically developing children. LEAP classrooms at Shady Lane preschool in the East End of Pittsburgh and the Children's Center for Creative Learning in the Sewickley YMCA maintain the same ratio of 2 typically developing children for every student with autism, but may have more children in the classroom.

For children diagnosed with autism

Children age 3-5 with a diagnosis of autism must be referred to LEAP by the Intermediate Unit (IU) associated with the family's school district. If a child has not been evaluated, the IU can perform the evaluation, then refer a child to LEAP if appropriate. Another agency can perform the evaluation, but the referral must come from the IU. School districts can direct parents to their local IU.

Intake

When a child is referred to LEAP, parents are invited to visit so that staff can observe the child in the classroom and talk about their needs. If we feel LEAP can meet those needs then we recommend placement. With input from the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team, we then write a new IEP, incorporating the dynamics of the LEAP preschool into the plan.

Services

Occupational, speech and physical therapy is available to children as needed. Our Family Service Coordinators work with families to carry the classroom learning environment over into the home. They are available to address specific developmental and behavioral needs and collaborate with service providers to ensure consistency between programs and at home.

For typically developing children

Typically developing children age 3-5 who have no need for early intervention services are an integral component of LEAP Preschool. The curriculum is developmentally appropriate, helping to prepare them for kindergarten and beyond.

Licensure and Accreditation

LEAP Preschool is licensed by the PA Department of Education. All our teachers and therapists maintain current credentials through professional development and licensing. We are also accredited by The National Commission for the Accreditation of Special Education Services (NCASES), ensuring that our programs incorporate the best current practices available in special education.

Outcomes

The goal of LEAP Preschool is for all children to reach their full potential so they are best able to benefit from the curriculum in their home school district. In the last three years over 60% of children diagnosed with autism who attended LEAP Preschool entered the regular education setting in their home school district.

Tuition

Tuition at any of our locations for students diagnosed with autism is paid directly to LEAP by the PA Department of Education.

For tuition information for typically developing students please contact the location you are interested in attending.

Contact Information

Students with autism:

Meagan Trimbur
Transition Coordinator
The Watson Institute
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Sewickley, PA 15143
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Typical peers:

Sharpsburg LEAP Office
200 N. Linden Ave.
Sharpsburg, PA 15215
412-781-1708
www.thewatsoninstitute.org

Gina Capriati
Shady Lane Preschool
100 North Braddock Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA
412-243-4040

Adrian Besong
Creative Center for Learning
Edgeworth Elementary School
200 Meadow Lane
Sewickley, PA 15143
412-651-6327

About The Watson Institute

The Watson Institute, through its family of schools and services, helps children and youth with special needs to achieve their fullest potential in all aspects of their lives. Watson strives to provide programs that serve the needs of children with autism spectrum disorders, neurological impairments and serious emotional challenges.

Watson Institute's specialized services include:

- Behavior Support for Schools
- Education
- Training and Consultation
- Diagnostic Evaluations
- Psychological Evaluations
- Medication Management
- Outpatient Services
- Support Groups
- Summer Camp Programs
- Respite Services
- Wraparound Services

For more information visit our website at www.thewatsoninstitute.org.