

LEAP PRESCHOOL

**Learning Experiences – an Alternative
Program
for Preschoolers and Parents**

**Parent Handbook
2025-2026**



**Watson
INSTITUTE**

200 Linden Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15215

The Watson Institute Mission Statement

The Watson Institute helps children with special needs achieve their fullest potential in all aspects of their lives

WHAT IS LEAP?

Learning Experiences – An Alternative Program for Preschoolers and Parents (LEAP) is a distinctive early childhood program that blends group instruction with individualized learning across a wide range of developmental skills. Operated by the Watson Institute, LEAP Preschool is an approved private preschool offering a traditional setting enriched with diverse, engaging activities in a structured and predictable environment.

What sets LEAP apart is its innovative educational philosophy and inclusive classroom design, which supports the growth of all children. While participating in activities like singing, painting, and playing games, children also learn important social values—such as embracing differences, cooperating with peers, and supporting one another's learning.

Each LEAP classroom is intentionally small, with a maximum of 12 children—8 typically developing children and 4 children diagnosed with autism. This low student-to-teacher ratio ensures that every child receives the individual attention they need to thrive.

Philosophy

We believe:

- ❖ All children (typically developing and children with autism) can benefit from an inclusive early childhood environment.
- ❖ Young children with autism benefit most from early intervention when efforts are coordinated across the preschool, home and community.
- ❖ Young children with autism make the greatest gains from early intervention when parents and professionals work together as partners.
- ❖ Young children with autism can learn many important skills (social, language, appropriate behavior) from their typical same-age peers.
- ❖ Young children with autism benefit most from early intervention when intervention efforts are planned, systematic, and individualized.
- ❖ All children (typically developing and children with autism) benefit from curricular activities that reflect developmentally appropriate practices.

Guiding Principles

We will:

- ❖ Support inclusive practices for all children.
- ❖ Provide age and developmentally appropriate activities.
- ❖ Capitalize on opportunities throughout the preschool day that maximizes learning of children with varying levels of abilities.
- ❖ Strive to improve natural teaching strategies which build on children's strengths and needs.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for generalization of acquired skills in school, home and community.
- ❖ Actively address children's social, language and sensory needs throughout the preschool day.
- ❖ Continually support professionals and families, collaborating as equal members of the instructional team.
- ❖ Facilitate educational, supportive, and social opportunities with families of enrolled children.

Daily Schedule – Morning/Afternoon Sessions

8:45-9:15/12:15- 12:45 Table Time

Table Time offers students the opportunity to interact with materials that are themed based and or manipulative in nature. Children may play with pre-planned materials then choose materials of interest off the shelves. Examples of Table Time activities may include; sorting manipulatives into function feature class, constructing with bristle blocks, lacing cards, sensory bin exploration, and puzzles. Table Time also offers students the opportunity to practice turn taking, and sharing as they interact with their peers.

9:15-9:30/12:45 –1:00 Circle Time

Through a routine-based setting at Circle Time, children will learn about the daily calendar, targeted theme, weather, and pre-math /pre reading concepts in a whole group setting. Students will be given appropriate seating options to meet their needs for optimal focus. Within Circle Time, students will have opportunities for peer interactions during greetings, story exploration, and exchange of manipulatives. Students are exposed to concepts of patterning, predictability, letter identification, mathematical interpretation, and comprehension. Songs and Finger Play Activities will target areas of fine motor and gross motor skills.

9:30 – 10:15/1:00 – 1:45 Developmental Learning Centers (Free-Play)

Students within a small group will transition through the following Learning Center.

- **Block Center** – Within the Block Center, students have the opportunity to manipulate blocks for construction, size comparison, and artistic expression. Supplies vary related to the educational theme. Educator and/or student directed tasks will target STEAM development as the child explores ramps, inclines, pulleys, and levers. Geography lessons including different kinds of houses are explored. This learning setting provides opportunities for parallel play, peer directed play, and interactive play.
- **Gross Motor Center** – Within the Gross Motor Learning Center, students will be provided with opportunities for large movements utilizing equipment such as small trampolines, tilt boards, sit and spins, soft body socks, pillows, and waited blankets. This area is designed with extra space for freedom of movement.
- **Social Dramatic Center** – Within the Social Dramatic Center students are encouraged to imitate, re-create, or expand the role of targeted themed characters and settings. Students will be supported with visual sequential cards that reinforce the focus of the current educational theme. Examples of sequential play activities may include; ordering food within a restaurant, setting the table, bathing and dressing a baby, and many more. Play prompts will be provided to support the student such as; housekeeping materials, dolls, dress up clothes, gardening tools, and other educationally themed items.
- **Science Center** – Within the Science Center students will be provided with the opportunity to pose questions, explore materials to make observations, and generate conclusions. Children will have access to microscopes, magnifying glasses, scales, living creatures, and other science prompts. Students will be encouraged to document their findings within their personal scientific journal.
- **Art Center** – Within the Art Center, students will have the opportunity to artistically express themselves as they create masterpieces. Students may be guided through a themed art project that related to the artist of the week or unguided for creative expression. Students will have access to a variety of materials such as; paint, glue, paper, tape, recycled items, scissors, writing utensils, and stickers. Artistic creations will be displayed for peers and family to enjoy.
- **Writing Center** – Within the Writing Center, students are encouraged to execute a variety of activities related to letter/word recognition, letter/word drawing, and/or story creations. Students will be provided with a variety of writing mediums such as journals, tracing paper, magazines, and sensory bins. Creative expression will be encouraged as children develop new words or stories to share with peers.
- **Math Center** – Within the Math Center, students will have the opportunity to explore manipulatives for mastery of skills related to sorting, patterns, grouping, shape identification, counting, number identification, and problem solving. Concepts will be presented through learning games, direct instruction, explorative play and practical applications.
- **Language Center** – Within the Language Center, students will be encouraged to express themselves with educator and peers through prompted play. Various activities will be implemented to target language skills for peer interaction, descriptive language, auditory comprehension, sentence expansion, and clarity of speech.

10:15 – 10:30/1:45 – 2:00 **Snack Time**

Our routine-based snack time is designed to promote peer interaction, social skills, and independence at the table. During this time, children practice serving themselves and engaging in pleasant conversation with classmates. Each child receives a designated portion of snack, either school-provided or brought from home, as trays are passed among students. As LEAP is a **nut-free facility**, all snacks—whether provided by the school or sent from home—must be completely free of nuts. To ensure safety, students are assigned **color-coded placemats** that indicate any food allergies or dietary restrictions. Snack Time also supports the development of practical life skills, including **utensil use, pouring liquids, and opening food packaging** independently.

10:30 – 10:45/2:00-2:15 **Books Time**

Book time provides students an opportunity to discover various forms of literature as students listen to stories or explore books. Books are often presented to correlate to the theme of the week. Students will gain knowledge related to features of books, specifically authors, table of contents, illustrator, etc. Through interactive “story bags,” students will have the opportunity to recreate or retell a well-known story marking main characters, details, problem/solutions, and events.

10:45-11:00/2:15-2:30 **Centers**

Students are divided into groups daily and each day highlights a specific Learning Experience including lessons on Language Arts, Mathematics, Nutrition, Health / Safety, and Social Science. Lessons can include manipulatives, songs, books, theme based materials.

11:00 –11:20/2:30-2:50 **Gross Motor Time/Outside Play**

Through the indoor – outdoor adapted play area, students will have the opportunity for large movements in motion while jumping, balancing, or swinging on gym equipment. Students will participate in guided activities or organized games that allow for peer interaction and interactive play. Students will have access to tricycles, cars, climbers, slides, play house, and scooters. Our unique indoor – outdoor play area, allows for students to gain access to outdoors, weather permitting.

11:20 –11:30/ 2:50-3:00 **Closing and Dismissal**

Students will have an opportunity to practice the skill of possession ownership, as they gather their personal belongings and join in conclusion circle time activities. Conclusion Circle Time allows an opportunity for the educator to summarize the learning targets of the day and present parents with carry-over home activities during dismissal.

NOTE: Monthly schedules of unit themes and special activities are posted outside each classroom door. Also, information will be shared in our monthly newsletter.



General Information

Preschool Hours of operation

School hours are 8:45 to 11:30 for the morning session and 12:15 to 3:00 for the afternoon session, Monday through Friday.

Arrival

- Your child's drop off will be at our main door
- Staff will be stationed at the door to greet you and take your child into the building
- The classroom children will gather together in the hall and go to their classroom together
- If your child is arriving on a bus, staff will take your child off the bus and into the building

*** *If you are late for arrival time, please buzz in and show your license and we will meet you at the door to escort your child to class. If you feel your child will struggle with this new transition, we can develop a plan to help. Please call or email us @412-781-1708.*

Departure

Each classroom will bring the children to the door and dismiss children to parents from the lobby area outside the door.

Absent/Tardy

In the event your child will be absent or late, please call the school (412-781-1708) before your child's starting time.

Parking/Security

When arriving and departing, please park in the parking lot on Penn Street (across the street from the school). Do not park where the busses pick up the children. Walk your child to the main door as close to arrival time as possible. Adults will open the door for children @ 8:45 and 12:15. Arrive for pick-up as close to departure time as well (11:30 and 3:00).

We are a secure building. Doors are always locked from the outside. To enter the building, push the button on your right and state your name. Be ready to show your license then wait for the green light to indicate entry.

All professional staff wear ID badges. Only those with proper Identification are permitted in the building. Visitors are requested to sign in at the office and the Raptor System will be used for all guests.

There are video cameras installed outside and inside the Sharpsburg building, including entrances, hallways, classrooms and the office. The video surveillance serves many purposes including providing protection from outside intruders.

Parking Lot Safety

Arrival and departure times are very busy; cars and busses are entering and leaving the parking lot at various times. We want your child to arrive at school safely. **Always hold your child's hand while walking to and from the building.** If you need adult assistance, talk to your child's teacher or call the office and someone will help you.

E2Campus Alert System

The Watson Institute uses the e2Campus emergency notification system for our preschool. This system enables us to send you news to your cell phone, home phone, and/or email account. LEAP Preschool staff can send timely information to you about emergencies, weather delays, or school reminders. Check with the office to ensure you have been added. Alert us with changes to your phone numbers or e-mails.

Emergency Procedures

There may be an occasion when we would need to follow an emergency plan. We practice (fire) drills monthly and lockdown drills 3 times a year. In the event of a real evacuation, we have an agreement to utilize the *Sharpsburg Family Worship Center* located at 600 Clay Street. Staff receive yearly in-services on Emergency Procedures, and evacuation plans are posted in each classroom.

In the event of an emergency evacuation, we have an emergency plan in place for alerting parents. Please make sure your contact information stays up-to-date and that we have the correct phone number for our **E2Campus Alert System**.

Student Release Form

Please remember to always update the "Student Release Form" on file for your child. We cannot release your child to anyone who is not on your permission form. However, in the event of an emergency, we will take phone verification from you if you need to send someone else for pick-up.

Custodial Relations

If your family status is that of a separated or divorced parent, and you have either formal or informal custody of the student attending any of the services or programs offered by the Watson Institute/LEAP Preschool, please provide us with the following information prior to enrollment:

1. Any court orders or directive related to custody and access to the child attending our program, if any such order exists.
2. Any shared custody plans signed by both parents.
3. Any information regarding parental understandings, expectations, and agreements in relation to the child's education and welfare. Information must be signed by both parents.
4. A statement verifying a non-legal "custodial parent" arrangement where neither parent has formally given up or gained any specific rights to making decisions affecting the child, and no legal determination of custody has been made.

Communication with Family

The staff at LEAP Preschool value communication with you and continue to strive for the best way to share information with you. Microsoft Classroom TEAMS is set up to help us communicate more efficiently with everyone. TEAMS will be where you can find posts from your child's team, thematic lessons in your child's classroom, and building information. You will be able to communicate directly to your child's teacher and other LEAP staff on your child's team. You should receive an email invitation to join the classroom at the beginning of the school year.

Snow Days

We will alert you for any school cancellations via E2Campus. Please be aware – we consider school closings in our area but make our own decisions, depending on road conditions. Look for a notice from us. If you do not get one, call the office @ 412-781-1708 or email us.

Visiting

Visitors from outside agencies need to schedule visits with the office staff prior to coming to school.

Parent Conferences

An individual parent conference can be scheduled at any time virtually via Microsoft Teams. Teachers will distribute information reports on your child's pre-academic progress on the *Pre-Kindergarten PA Learning Standards for Early Childhood* curriculum twice per year. These reports will be given to you in January and June. You may request a conference at that time, as well.

Phone Time

If you would like to talk to the teachers or therapists, please call between 8:00 and 8:45 or after 3:00. You also may leave a message and the call will be returned to you as soon as possible.

LEAP Curriculum and PA Educational Standards

Learning activities are organized by basic themes in the classroom. These themes help children learn about their world, and give children experiences that are interesting and fun. Themes are changed weekly at times, but a theme may last longer, depending on the number of activities and children's interests. They are shared with you in the monthly newsletter and on the communication board outside each classroom door.

Embedded in theme-related activities are the *Pre-Kindergarten PA Learning Standards for Early Childhood*, provided to us by the Department of Education and the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. These Standards provide us with a framework for helping children learn the skills they need for kindergarten. You are able to access a copy of these standards by going to www.pakeys.org or stop in the office to review it.

Social skill development is a primary focus at LEAP Preschool. We encourage a sense of belonging among all the children and embed prosocial behaviors across all activities in the day. We teach children to reach out and empathize with each other, accept and celebrate differences, and to communicate their feelings. Children are taught specific strategies for how to get a friend's attention by using the child's name and to keep trying. Friendship is defined by everyone learning to get along with each other. We encourage children to help each other.

We are licensed by the PA Department of Education.



In 2022 LEAP Preschool demonstrated quality programming by meeting the 10 NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) Early Learning Program Standards and earned NAEYC Accreditation. We are proud to provide your child with research-based best practices for young children's development and learning.

PYRAMID MODEL

The Pyramid Model promotes young children's (birth to five years old) social-emotional competence and prevents and addresses challenging behavior, through a tiered promotion, prevention, and intervention framework. There are 3 Tiers adults use to guide them:

Tier 1 promotes nurturing and responsive caregiving relationships and high-quality environments. At this level, practitioners focus on their relationships with children and their families by providing nurturing and responsive support and engaging children in relationships with others. Practices at this level involve supportive environments to prevent problem behavior, engage all children, and develop social-emotional skills. For many children, Tier 1 may be all that is needed to support their healthy social-emotional development.

Tier 2 serves as a prevention level. It focuses on explicit social skills instruction like Self-regulation, Expressing and understanding emotions, Developing social relationships, and Problem-solving.

Tier 3 focuses on individualized, intensive interventions for children who have the most persistent challenging behavior. Even with Tier 1 and Tier 2 systems in place, there may be children who need an individualized behavior support plan. These plans typically include prevention strategies, instructions of new skills, and guidance on how to respond in order to reduce challenging behavior and increase new skill use.

Discipline Policy

LEAP Preschool believes all children have strengths and needs. We have a team of professionals who have the appropriate resources to help support social-emotional and behavioral development. We do not support expulsion or suspension and prioritize working with family members and other professionals to develop the tools and experiences all children need to thrive.

We have a positive discipline policy that focuses on prevention, redirection, love, consistency, and clarity. We teach all children to respect others and provide guidance techniques so that children will be provided with a safe, happy, and comfortable environment. The purpose of discipline is to help children develop self-control and to teach children that each person is responsible for his own actions. Classroom rules are reinforced and break areas are provided for children to learn to calm down. Time-outs are not used.

Parent Groups

Parent groups operate throughout the school year and include a variety of topics that are based on parent survey results! Our Family Service Coordinator will be holding parent learning opportunities via Microsoft TEAMS and will encourage parents to collaborate.

Please remember, that we are available to you for individual support, community resources, or behavior concerns. Contact us.

Volunteer Services

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact our Family Service Coordinator. In-class volunteers must adhere to *The Watson Institute's* volunteer guidelines, which include obtaining appropriate clearances.

School Clothing

Since children engage in many different activities during the day, they may get their clothes soiled. School clothing should be:

- Washable and durable
- Comfortable for the weather
- Easy for the child to manipulate
- Shoes that are sturdy for running and climbing

NOTE: An extra set of clothing should be left with your child's teacher. Write your child's name on all labels of clothing.

Outdoor Clothing

Please write your child's name on each item. Hats, coats, boots, etc., will be kept in your child's classroom on hooks or shelves.

Birthdays* Please call your child's teacher before sending in birthday gifts

You are welcome to bring in a special treat or snack to celebrate your child's birthday. Inform your child's teachers at least a day in advance to make special arrangements. Please refrain from handing out invitations to personal birthday parties at school unless **all** children in your child's class are invited. **Balloons are not permitted in school. They are a choking hazard.**

Pet/Animal Policy

At times, pets and small animals are permitted in the classroom as an educational resource. The teaching staff supervise all interactions between children and animals, and instruct children on safe techniques when in close contact to animals. Children who have known allergies to a type of animal are not exposed to that animal. **In general, pets are not permitted in or outside the building.**

Holidays

Teachers prepare special activities to celebrate holidays. You will receive information prior to that day. A sign-up sheet will be posted in each classroom asking for volunteers or treats. Please feel free to send in a treat or volunteer to help us.

Open House –

Each year, an Open House is scheduled in the fall. Parents, children and family members are invited to their child's classroom, and are given a general review of classroom activities and the preschool curriculum. You will also be given an opportunity to explore information regarding the other services provided at our school.

The week of Open House we will have informational workshops available for you to learn about our curriculum and how we set up activities/opportunities for including all children in the preschool classroom. Workshops will be available for you to learn about how we individualize for children, including autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disorders. Social skills curriculum will be introduced to you at this time as well.

Family Picnic

A family picnic is scheduled at the end of each school year. We welcome your family to join with LEAP staff to celebrate the end of the school year.

Health and Medical Information

Physical Examination

A certificate of immunization and health assessment report must be completed by your child's Pediatrician, and returned to the LEAP office when your child enters the program. **The immunization form needs to be completed and returned by the first day of school.**

Medical Administration

If your child requires medication during the school day, we will need a prescription and written instructions from your child's physician. Contact the school nurse for specific information regarding requirements.

Sunscreen

Please apply to your child before arriving at school. Staff are unable to apply anything topical.

Illness:

Please refer to Medical Guidelines For Student Illnesses located on page 10

Injury Prevention

Children have little or no idea of danger. It is our responsibility to ensure they are safe. We will check the preschool constantly to ensure a safe environment. It is most important you clearly hand your child over to a staff member each day so we know we are responsible from that point in time. No matter how careful we are, accidents do and will happen. We have a nurse on staff but we are committed to keeping all staff up-to-date with CPR and first aid training. We will ensure that at least one member of staff, who has a current first-aid certificate, is in the preschool at all times.

In the event of an injury, staff will assess and determine:

- If injury is *minimal or minor*, first aid will be given immediately and a parent will be called. You will be asked if you would like to come to school to assess the situation.
- If injury is *serious*, *our school nurse or* staff trained in first aid will attend to the child, medical assistance/ambulance will be called. Parents will be called. A staff member will accompany the child in the ambulance until a parent arrives.

Environmental Healthy Practices in our School

- We avoid usage of aerosol products and sprays including hair spray, cooking spray and air fresheners. These kinds of products can release chemical droplets in the air and these droplets could be inhaled by a child. Droplets can trigger asthma and allergy symptoms.
- We use cold water in all bathrooms and for drinking. Cold water is less likely to leach lead from pipes.
- We use rough mats at our main entrance to reduce lead contaminated dirt from entering the building.
- We use a licensed pest management company that deals with pests in a least toxic and environmentally sensitive manner. Chemicals are used when children are not present in the school.



MEDICAL GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ILLNESSES *(Please keep at home for reference)*

2024-2025 School Year

YOUR CHILD IS TO REMAIN HOME IF THEY HAVE ANY OF FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS:

Oral temperature above 100 degrees	Nausea/vomiting
Nausea/vomiting	Diarrhea/loose stool
Excessive nasal drainage	Unusually irritable, restless or tired/sleepless night
Persistent cough	Sore throat
Suspected pink eye, scabies, lice, ringworm, impetigo, chicken pox, rashes and MUST be seen by a doctor . Send in a note from doctor stating that your child is being treated and it is ok to return to school.	

GUIDELINES FOR WHEN YOUR CHILD CAN RETURN TO SCHOOL AFTER ILLNESS:

Condition	Minimum Days from State of Illness
Vomiting	After Child has kept food down for 24 hours
Diarrhea	24 hours after last diarrhea
Fever	Once the temperature is normal for 24 hours WITHOUT Tylenol or other fever reducing medications
Strep Throat	24 hours after treatment begins, <i>send note from doctor</i>
Pinkeye, Lice, Scabies, Ringworm	24 hours after treatment begins, <i>send note from doctor</i>
Chicken Pox	6-7 days or until all blisters are dry, <i>send note from doctor</i>
Covid	If test positive for COVID-19 and have been fever-free for 24 hours without medication, with mild and improving symptoms , may return to school

IF YOUR CHILD BECOMES SICK AT SCHOOL:

You will be contacted to come pick up your child.
It is MANDATORY that you have designated a family member or friend who is available to pick up your child if you are unable to.

HOSPITALIZATION POLICY:

If your child stayed overnight in the hospital for ANY reason, they must remain at home for 24 hours after discharge before returning to school. This is to ensure that he/she does not relapse and is fully recovered.
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The following information is required in order to return to school:
Note from the doctor stating what date the student may return
List of restrictions or no restrictions (i.e. gym, therapies, etc.)
Hospital discharge papers

All paperwork can be faxed to the nurse in Sharpsburg at 412-781-2739. Any questions, please call 412-781-1708 ext 5549.