



# News & Notes

## Mushroom Family Learning Center

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mushroomfamily.org

### Important Dates / Info

#### TUITION DUE FEBRUARY 1

**GENERAL REGISTRATION FOR 2013-14 BEGINS FEB. 4**  
Tell your friends and family!

#### NEXT AUNTIE ANNE'S FUNDRAISER FEB. 11

**STAFF MEETING TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12**  
Early dismissal at 11 a.m.; late arrival at 1 p.m. No lunch.

#### NO SCHOOL FEBRUARY 18 - PRESIDENTS DAY

**SCHOOL PICTURES WILL BE TAKEN MARCH 5-7**

#### OUTSIDE PLAY

Please be sure your kids are prepared for 28+ degree winter days (and include proper play shoes, especially on movement day) and mark all outerwear.

#### ILLNESS POLICY

Many different "bugs" are going around. Children need to be fever free or vomit/diarrhea free for 24 hours and able to benefit fully from being at school in order to attend.

#### ENRICHMENT CLASSES AND "MUNCHIN' LUNCHIN'" SPOTS ARE AVAILABLE

Contact Jamie Geisler at [jamie\\_geisler@comcast.net](mailto:jamie_geisler@comcast.net).

#### WAYS TO HELP MUSHROOM

- United Way agency # is 885339.
- Giant Eagle's Apples for the Students program # is 5245.
- Save Labels for Education and ProjectA+ labels from Tyson frozen chicken products (bin in the stairwell) .
- Help other families by donating to the MFLC Scholarship Fund.

### A Big Thank-You to...

- Eli and Collin Jacobs and family for their donation of clothes and books.

### And a Big Mushroom Welcome to...

Davey Anthon and family (Early Learners-PM), Henry Clark and family (4s), and Metta Loyd and family (PreK-PM)!

**...Plus Future Mushroomer Simon Maxwell Jacobs, born Jan. 26!** Congrats to parents Lauren and Bob and big brothers Eli (PreK AM) and Collin (3s).

### From the director...

I am sure you are all familiar with the commercial jingle "The best part of waking up... is Folgers in your cup." Well the best part of my job is to see each child and his/her family member enter the building with joy and anticipation of what the day will bring. It truly "fills my bucket" seeing the happiness and innocence of the children as they give me a smile, wave, or stop to share a story.

On December 14, 2012, for all of us, the innocence of childhood was rocked. All schools across the country have been re-evaluating security procedures. The teachers, board of directors, and I have also been reviewing our procedures. For Mushroom to complete this evaluation thoroughly we have contacted outside consultants to guide us through this process.

My monthly meeting of South Hills preschool directors was held on January 14, and the main topic of discussion was security measures and issues in our respective schools.

At our January MFLC Board of Directors meeting, there was a unanimous vote to implement for our 2013-2014 school year a phone alert system that would contact parents in the event of an emergency.

During the week of January 24, I met with a security consultant from Protec America Security Solutions to discuss additional measures that could be implemented to better secure our facility. The one obstacle we discussed was the front door, which we have been so proud of in welcoming all of our families for many years. The board of directors and I are working on a solution, and as a tenant, we need to continue to discuss this with our landlord to reach a workable solution.

In addition, on February 12, during our monthly staff meeting, a police officer will be reviewing our safety procedures.

I offer you my promise and commitment that we as a school community will do everything in our power to continue to provide for all students a warm environment that's as safe and secure as possible. If at any time you have questions and/or concerns, please know that you may contact me, a teacher or a board member to discuss.

*Joan*

Joan Harrison

**P.S. Be sure to check out page 7 of this newsletter for a summary article on assessing a child's readiness for school!**



**Parking Lot and Dropoff/Pickup Reminders**



Thank you for keeping our school families safe!

- Our lot is ONE WAY, entering from Washington, exiting to Sunnyhill.
- Parking is not permitted in front of the school or along the left side of the exit driveway. This is a requirement of the fire department.
- Please observe the handicapped parking spots.
- Drive slowly and carefully, especially when backing out, and be observant of the cars and people around you.
- Don't leave other children unattended in the vehicle during dropoff or pickup. Stay alert and keep kids close to you when walking in the lot.

**If you arrive early, please wait in the foyer until 8:55am/12:25pm.**

for our children while still being a welcoming place to come.

One more thing...I promise! We will be looking for a few new members of the board for this coming school year (term begins this May). If you are looking for a way to be more involved, please consider joining us. If you are curious as to what being a member of the board means, please reach out to me or another board member and ask any questions. We do have monthly meetings (usually the third Tuesday of the month), and you would be asked to help out with some of the school activities throughout the year. But we have several parents on the board who work full time, with very young children and with several children even! It is a wonderful group of people all working toward the same goal of making Mushroom the best it can be for our children!



Thank you and I hope you all have a wonderful February!

*Erin*

Erin Bignell

**News from the Early Learners class from Theresa, Marlene, and Debbie...**

The weather has been crazy and we have been too! Hibernating is OK for the bears but not for us! We've been too busy to just sleep. We made our own caves and went on a bear hunt with our flashlights. When we found the bears we gave them a sweet ride in our mobile bear caves. We discovered that even bears have to wear seat belts. Best of all we had Papa Bear, Momma Bear and Baby Bear join us for snack. We even invited Goldilocks and shared some instant porridge with her. It was just right!



We also brought out the scissors and began practicing how to use them. Some children are already so good at cutting that we could use them as our pattern cutters. Others are using every muscle they have to get their scissors to work. Their faces contort in every direction and their tongues move from side to side as they concentrate on making a successful cut.

We began working on matching and making pairs. "Who has a mitten like I do, who has a mitten like me? Wave it in the air.

**From the president of the board...**

February is here!!! My favorite month since it's my birthday month and Valentine's Day....but now as a mother, it signifies that the busiest time of the year for my family is OVER!! My husband and both of my boys have birthdays between Christmas and January 30. So February is officially MY month to breathe a sigh of relief and maybe get spoiled a little!

The past month as well as the coming month several exciting things have been going on at our school. We just started registration for the next school year and several classes are already full! That is a true testament to what a wonderful school we have. So if you haven't already turned in your registration, please get it in as soon as you can. Registration goes "public" on February 4. The biggest compliment you can give our school is to tell others about it! I know I came to Mushroom on a recommendation of several other Mushroom parents. So please, spread the word!!



I just booked our next two fundraisers as well. The Tupperware fundraiser went VERY well for our first time doing it! I hope you are pleased with your items. If there are any errors/concerns, please let Joan or me know. In February (11th-25th), we will be doing Oakbrook (Auntie Anne's) again. Rather than the holiday catalog, this time there will be a jewelry catalog along with the food. I thought that would be appropriate for the month when some ladies may be hoping to get a little "bling!" Have your significant other pick something out of this catalog to help support our school!

In March (11th-21st), we will be doing Mixed Bags again. And the new catalog looks GREAT! Lots of new designs and styles are being offered, including canvas bags. If anyone cares to preview the catalog, here is the link— <http://fundraiser.mixedbagdesigns.com/Spring-Catalog>.

On a more serious note, over the past month, the staff and board of directors have been considering whether and what changes might be made at our school to increase the level of safety and security in light of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary in December. I don't want to repeat what Joan has stated in her column, but just know that we are doing all we can, within the constraints of budget and being a tenant, to address any concerns and make our school as safe as possible



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## School delay/cancellation



MFLC will follow Mt. Lebanon School District decisions during inclement weather: When MTLSD is delayed, MFLC will be delayed; when MTLSD is canceled, MFLC will be canceled. Delayed start time will be 10 a.m. for morning classes which will dismiss at regular time; afternoon classes will begin on schedule. Please check local TV and cable stations, email blasts and the school answering machine when in doubt.

We'll make a pair. Who has a mitten like me?" The children can easily match pairs of mittens and now are able to remind us when we go outside that their borrowed mittens don't match. The five little bears have been popping up on the felt board too. Each bear finds a cave to hibernate in, reinforcing the concept of one-to-one correspondence. Matching and making pairs has been in many of our lessons. The children put on their thinking caps as they paired puzzle pieces of things that go together such as shoes and socks or mailboxes and letters.

We have also enjoyed just getting to know each other better. Now that the children are more talkative, they have begun socializing more with their classmates. There is a lot of hot air in the room to keep us warm!

February will be exciting when our "shape friends" come to class. When they visit, we begin talking about all the shapes around us. Harry Heart will be our first shape. We'll make a lot of things with the heart shape and the color red. Also during this month we will continue with nursery rhymes and fairy tales. As the year progresses, we like to work on having the children focus longer on specific activities. Putting on plays and listening to stories allows us to provide the children with more experience in this area which then aids in increasing their attention span.

A big "thank-you" goes out to all our parents for bringing us so many great snacks. Your donations make our snack time wonderfully delicious and we truly appreciate it. We are having a great time with all your children and truly enjoy their emerging personalities!

### News from the 3s class from Jamie, Debbie, and Christine...

We are very proud to announce that our class completed our 10 acts of kindness this month! We made cards for a nursing home, the soldiers and our friend who was in the hospital. We collected items for the soldiers and the food bank as well as coins to purchase books for Children's Hospital. We shared our toys and made cookies for the teachers. We did a great job showing kindness to others. It was a great way to start the new year.

We had fun exploring snow and ice in January. We made snowmen out of shaving cream and marshmallows, and replaced our sand with actual snow and ice. We decorated characters with winter clothes and even painted with ice cubes.

Our class also learned more about polar bears and brown bears. We had a teddy bear picnic and ended the unit with a Hibernation Party, wearing our pajamas and hibernating in our sleeping bags.



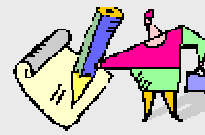
The 3s class added some new items to our routine in January. We started our guest reader program where a family member or friend reads stories to the class. The benefits of this program can be seen on the faces of the children who share their family members with us. It is pure joy. We added weather reporters to our jobs list; two students are selected each day. They stand outside, observe the weather and then report it to the class using complete sentences.

We also started bringing in items to share with our classmates. This is a great activity for the students to practice their communication skills and their questioning skills. We have learned to ask great questions as well as be good listeners. This activity is one of the highlights of the week. During center time the children are then allowed to share their toys with their friends.

Next month we will begin our unit on Make-Believe. We will board the trolley and head toward the castles where the princesses and knights live. We will then take a turn to the oceans to learn more about pirates. It will be exciting to see where our imagination takes us in February!

### News from the 3/4s class from Liz, Marlene, and Brian...

In January, we explored the topic of "Animals in Winter." We asked the question, "What happens to the animals when winter comes?" We focused on the two main challenges animals face in cold winter climates: staying warm and finding food. Your children should by now be familiar with the idea that some animals stay, some go to a warmer place, and others hibernate.



## Have you registered for the 2013-2014 school year?

If not, please stop by the office and talk to Joan. Registration is opening to the public on February 4. The very best compliment you can pay us is to recommend Mushroom Family Learning Center to a friend or neighbor. We thank you for your continued commitment and support!

In February, we will focus on fairy tales and make-believe. We will have a Valentine exchange on Thursday, February 14. Check your e-mail for more information about this event.

## News from the 4s class from Liz, Kim, and Melanie...

This month our theme was "Animals in Winter." Through books, play and fine-motor experiences, we explored the challenges faced by woodland animals when the weather turns cold.

How does an animal find enough food in winter's challenging climate? We learned about animals that store food, such as squirrels; animals that forage for food, such as deer and some birds; animals that migrate to warmer locations, such as some birds; and animals that store fat and sleep a lot, such as bears. We also explored the kinds of food each animal prefers. We even got to investigate a real owl pellet and discovered several skulls and other bones, as well as fur.

We found plenty of opportunities this month to develop our literacy skills in ways that are personally meaningful to the children. After reading the story *The Mitten* and acting out the roles of the different animals, we pursued the concept of different versions of a story. Each child dictated his/her own version of the story. We wrote down their words and recited the story so they could act out the different versions. We compiled these stories into a class book, too. The best part about this activity is that the children themselves initiated the writing process as a way to accommodate everyone's ideas.



We have also started using a "sign-up sheet" for taking turns with popular toys, such as the cash register. The children sign their names (great practice!) in order and can self-monitor the turn-taking process. It is wonderful to see them taking hold of literacy as a tool to help their community function smoothly and fairly!

Another way we are practicing literacy skills is through our daily journal time. The children trace the letter of the week and draw things that start with that letter; they respond to



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Throughout the month, as we added to our knowledge, we also added to our interactive bulletin board. We experimented with different art techniques and materials to create a representation of the children's concept of the woods in winter. We encouraged the children to keep adding to the display, both through teacher-initiated art projects and through the children's original ideas.

We learned about birds that stay "in Pittsburgh" during the winter, focusing on cardinals and blue jays. We practiced our fine motor skills by playing with birds made from clothespins, pretending to look for food. The children made their own birds to take home and play with as well. We also made bird feeders by stringing Cheerios onto pipe cleaners.



Many children knew that fur could keep an animal warm. We learned about other ways animals stay warm, such as storing fat and finding shelter. To observe how fat acts as an insulator, we put shortening in a plastic bag, and then put another plastic bag inside, so that the children could put their hands in without getting greasy. They put their "fat hands" into the ice and were amazed to discover that they stayed warm! We filled our sensory table with real snow when we had it, and "fake" snow when we didn't, and had endless fun creating tunnels and dens for the woodland animals.

No study of winter animals would be complete without bears and other hibernators. Unlike bears, who wake and leave their dens to look for food on warmer days, turtles, snakes and frogs stay asleep all through the winter. We finished the month with our very own hibernation party. The children wore their pajamas to school and brought stuffed animals and sleeping bags. We got cozy in dens made from play tents.

We have started turning to our journals on a daily basis. We are working on encouraging awareness of shapes around us, as well as developing representational drawing skills. Presented with a shape of the day, the children used that shape as a jumping-off point for their own drawing. What does a triangle make you think of—a piece of pizza, a party hat, or a roof?





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open-ended questions; and they plan their play.

Our fine-motor skills have been getting a workout this month, too, with activities such as cutting, sewing, and clipping clothespins. It has been exciting to see the children's interest and skill in this area grow!



The weather provided plenty of frustration for this group of avid outdoor lovers. We talked about the school's criteria for outside play (temperature above 28 degrees, not raining, safe playground conditions) and the children came up with the idea to create a "weather calendar" to figure out whether we could play outside.

Toward the end of the month we began thinking about how we could use mathematical concepts (measurement, graphing, etc.) to figure out what is going on with our daily weather. We introduced scientific terms such as temperature, thermometer, graph and wind chill (ugh!). Although we have just begun this project, I am excited to see where the children's ideas will lead us in this investigation!

A new friend joined us this month, too. Henry is a great addition to the class! It has been wonderful to watch the children welcome him into our community.

Next month our theme will be Fairy Tales and Make-Believe. We will also have a Valentine's Day celebration and Valentine exchange on Friday, February 15.

## News from the Pre-K morning class from Cara, Jane, and Brian...

This month we have been exploring the theme "Let's Take Flight" on many different levels and enjoying each step of the way! We set the context for our month by observing and responding to the winter season. We first observed the snow on the beautiful tree outside our classroom window and then used our creativity to create our own winter tree with paint, glue, glitter and a cut-out tree silhouette. They were absolutely beautiful and each one unique!

Our outdoor classroom (the playground) provided a wonderful landscape to explore with snowball fights, ice sculpture and

## DOES YOUR CHILD LOVE BEING AT MUSHROOM?



*Could you use a little more time for errands or work?*

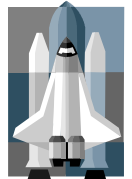
**Then sign him/her up for enrichment and/or "Munchin' Lunchin!"**

Supervised lunchtime is \$6 per day for kids 3+. In enrichment, the children have fun making crafts, cooking, learning Spanish and reading new stories. Classes are available for those 4+ on Mondays and/or Fridays each month; \$14 per class. Sign up for however many you like! Contact Jamie for more info at [jamie\\_geisler@comcast.net](mailto:jamie_geisler@comcast.net).

snowman creations, and even taking time to help Mr. Brian shovel the ice and snow. I must say our children have wonderful aim, and I was a prime target for several snowballs! I guess you could say that it fit in with the flight theme...

Back in the classroom, we painted snowmen, explored how ice melts and discussed what animals do in the wintertime.

During the week of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, we explored the context of flight in regard to our dreams and how to "think big." In the dramatic play room, we worked very hard together to create an awesome rocket ship out of different materials, which also included a hand-drawn control panel. Several "security specialists" used their clipboards to create safety checklists to be completed prior to takeoff! We also worked together as a team to create a rocket ship mural that we cut out and hung in the hallway.



We each completed a dream cloud, which expressed one of our own personal dreams. These are now displayed with our moon and rocket ship! Dr. King's birthday provided a wonderful opportunity to discuss how each of us has the power to influence rules/laws to make sure all of our friends are accepted and treated equally.

After having our heads up in the clouds all week, we needed to get our feet grounded, and did so by tracing and measuring our feet as means to explore measurement and begin looking at animal tracks in the winter. Of course, we also needed to turn the dramatic play room into a shoe store. We were measuring feet, handling cash transactions and providing good customer service. The children also took creative liberty and finished the week with a shoe fashion show complete with a runway they created!

We finished the month off by learning more about our class mascot, Snowy the Owl. The children have always been curious as to why our puppet, Snowy, is able to turn his head all the way around, so we needed to find out! We continued our exploration of this theme by looking in our own backyard and learning more about the birds that stay with us all winter. Our children also continue to "take flight" as they expand their academic, social and emotional skills. It is such a wondrous process to watch unfold.





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During February you will find our class growing and learning with each other as we delve into "Nourishing Ourselves, Staying Healthy." Valentine's Day was my springboard as I considered the importance of what keeps us healthy on all levels, like sleep, nutrition, exercise, love/friendship, and celebrations.

## News from the Pre-K afternoon class from Cathy and Melanie...

We had a wonderful start to the new year! Everyone was happy to be back at school to be with their friends and to get down to getting prepared for kindergarten.

We have been working on letter recognition by covering a letter a week since October. Last month (K, L, M) we made kangaroos, koalas and learned about marsupials. We moved on to lions and ladybugs, and made monkey bread and masks.

It is so wonderful to see the children trying to sound out a word or attempt to phonetically spell it. We have our word list that we add to each week which also includes sight words. We have been playing with letter recognition games, alphabet Bingo and number Bingo. So look out, kindergarten, here we come!!!



February is the month of LOVE. There will be tons of hearts, poems, songs and stories. We will be using our fine-motor skills cutting, gluing, pasting and painting. We will need a shoe-box the first week of February to paint and decorate so that we have someplace to deliver our Valentines. We ask that you please have your child sign his/her name on the cards and leave the envelopes blank. This really helps in the delivery! We will have a Valentine's Day Party on Thursday, Feb. 14. Our wonderful homeroom parent, Stacy, will be getting things ready and will put up a list of things to contribute if you wish.

This month we will still be learning about animals in winter, hibernation and, of course, Groundhog Day (Feb. 2). Our alphabet letters will be N, O, P. We hope the weather will cooperate and we can get outside more to shovel and play in the snow. On days that are 28 and above we WILL go out so please have boots, hats, mittens and snow pants. It's hard to play when cold and soggy. This group of children is



**Mushroom Wish List** ~ If you or someone you know may be able to contribute, please let Joan know!

- Little Tykes ride-on fire truck
- Clothes (underwear, socks, pants, tops), especially for girls
- Dress-up clothes (especially for boys)
- Snow pants/snow suits, boots

soooo wonderful; they're kind and inclusive. We ALL play together and may be a small group but we are mighty!!!! We teachers love spending our afternoons with them. Stay warm!

## News from the K-Too class from Marilyn...

In January we wrote about the holiday break. We learned and wrote about two more world holidays: Kwanzaa (U.S.) and Diwali (India). We made *kinaras* (menorah-like candle holders) and learned the history of African-Americans for Kwanzaa. We heard the legend of Prince Rama's triumph over the evil nine-headed demon (boys loved this), the lights, oil lamps, and *rangoli* decorations of Diwali.

We studied Martin Luther King, Jr. and discussed his dream of people being judged by "the content of their character, not the color of their skin." We saw the culmination of King's dream in our president, Mr. Obama, who was just inaugurated.

The children wrote about what they would do if they were president. They also wrote about their dreams and decided to, like Martin Luther King, try to make their dreams come true by proposing them as laws! They learned the three branches of government. To make these abstract institutions more concrete, we made models of the buildings that house them: the White House, the Capitol, and the Supreme Court. We then pretended to submit bills. The bills had to pass the House and Senate, be signed or vetoed by the president, and be tested by the Supreme Court. These children have a head start in civics!



In February we will talk and write about "love" as well as our founding fathers. We will also begin a unit on electricity. What is it? Who discovered it, and how? How can we be safe with it? What work can it do? We will construct an electrically powered house and write about what we learn.

For any Mushroom families not familiar with K-Too, it is a kindergarten enrichment class. Children often need an activity beyond their day at kindergarten and K-Too is an extension of their learning and social time in a smaller, more intimate setting. Please feel free to stop in and observe the class any time. You can register for K-Too now with Joan or registration for new families starts February 4.

## ***How Do You Define School Readiness? It May Be More Than You Think***

In the March/April 2008 *Exchange* magazine (childcareexchange.com), Tufts University child development professor Emeritus and author David Elkind wrote an article entitled “**Some Misunderstandings of School Readiness**” that describes shortcomings of the usual thinking about developing and determining our children’s readiness for school.

In the article, Elkind explains that “school readiness” once referred to children being ready for first grade, but over the years a fear of our country’s children falling behind in the world has intensified and a stronger focus on early education and academics has developed, making readiness for kindergarten more of a pressing concern.

Elkind says that focusing solely on mental preparedness, academics (knowledge of letters and numbers, etc.) or maturation is a misunderstanding of what readiness is all about. Following are the typical categories of thought regarding school readiness and key points offered by Elkind as to why each may not fully encompass true preparedness for our children.

### **Readiness in the child’s head (preparedness to meet the academic demands)**

- ✧ Because there are many different kinds of kindergarten and different kinds of children, there cannot be a specific preparation that can make them “ready.” Readiness is a “relationship between the child’s level of social/emotional and intellectual development and the particular expectations of the program in which he or she is enrolled.”
- ✧ The increase in early childhood education programs has helped to address that preparedness disparity, but many politicians, educators and parents have desired to start “education” earlier and change the nature of early school programs.
- ✧ Where kindergarten used to be half-day and play-focused, in many places it has mostly become a full-day training program for entering first grade (which now has specific skill requirements).

### **Readiness as the attainment of literacy and numerical skills**

- ✧ An extensive study by U.S. Department of Education investigators West and Hasken (1995) showed that children who attended a preschool program attained significantly more pre-literacy and numerical skills than those who did not.
- ✧ However, the effects of attending preschool were reduced when risk factors were present in a child’s history (poverty, low maternal education, minority language, single-parent home, etc.).
- ✧ A second finding of the study indicates that most kindergarten teachers do not believe that knowing letters, numbers, shapes, etc. are essential for success in kindergarten, but place emphasis on health and the ability to communicate, follow instructions, and work cooperatively.

### **Readiness and early academic training**

- ✧ Advocates of early educational systems and electronic media companies contend that tremendous academic potential is being lost within traditional, play-oriented early childhood programs, but they have not offered any systematic evidence of the effects of their systems.
- ✧ Research thus far has not indicated that early academic training is more conducive to long-term academic achievement than the traditional developmental program and, in fact, suggests that the opposite is true: young children’s play may actually provide the better preparation for later academic learning.
- ✧ Studies of American and Israeli children done by psychologist Sara Smilansky found that “socio-dramatic play activates resources that stimulate social and intellectual growth...which in turn affects the child’s success in school.” Examples given include problem solving, which requires a lot of make-believe; visualizing other cultures; imagining a story and writing it; arithmetic problem solving; and determining what comes next. These are ways of conceptually constructing things not directly experienced.

### **Readiness and maturation**

- ✧ Historically, the Gesell Scales (from child development studies by Yale pediatrician Arnold Gesell and colleagues) were widely used as a set of measures to assess a child’s “readiness” for formal education and focused on the importance of a child’s level of maturation (primarily as it related to age).
- ✧ Today we realize that maturation is one aspect of development but environment must also be taken into account. Evidence suggests that “the most effective early childhood programs are those adapted to the child’s level of intellectual, social and emotional development.”

In conclusion, Elkind states that a true assessment of school readiness “**must always take account of the child’s level of intellectual and social/emotional development, his or her experiential background, and the classroom expectations the child will encounter.**”

***So now you know why Mushroom Family Learning Center believes in the power of learning through play, providing an environment where each child is free to grow socially, emotionally, physically, intellectually and creatively!***