GMPS
Glenview Methodist Preschool
est. 1965

Purposeful Play, Powerful Learning

How GMPS combines play-based learning with intentional early literacy and math

Play is the work of childhood - and one of the primary ways young children learn.

At GMPS, play-based does not mean unplanned. Teachers intentionally design environments, choose materials, ask questions, introduce skills, and extend children's thinking. Play and academics are not opposites here: purposeful play is paired with developmentally appropriate instruction so children build strong foundations without being rushed out of childhood.

What does play-based learning really mean?

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Children Explore	**Teachers Are Intentional**	**Learning Grows**
Children investigate, build, create, pretend, move, talk, test ideas, make choices, and solve real problems.	Teachers observe, plan, introduce materials and skills, join play when helpful, ask questions, and know when to step back.	Language, literacy, math, science, self-regulation, creativity, problem-solving, and social skills develop together.

So, are children "just playing"?

Imagine a group of children running a pretend restaurant. To them, it is play. To a teacher, it is a rich learning experience happening across many areas at once.

Early Literacy	Math	Social + Thinking
• drawing or writing menus	• counting plates and seats	• taking roles and turns
• hearing sounds in words	• comparing quantities	• negotiating disagreements
• using new vocabulary	• using number and spatial words	• solving problems together

A teacher might add a notepad, ask whether there are enough plates, introduce a new word, or wonder what the restaurant needs next. That is intentional teaching through play.

Intentional teaching through play

Observe	Plan	Invite	Guide	Extend
What do children know and wonder?	Choose goals, materials & experiences	Spark curiosity and participation	Ask, model, prompt & support	Build on what happens next

How do the Illinois Early Learning Standards fit in?

GMPS teachers use the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS) to guide curriculum and planning. The standards describe reasonable expectations for preschool growth and learning across language and literacy, math, science, social studies, physical development, the arts, social-emotional development, and approaches to learning.

Illinois State Board of Education - Early Learning Standards

Play + purposeful instruction

Play is the heart of our program, but it is not the only way children learn. We intentionally add brief, developmentally appropriate teacher-led experiences where they are valuable - especially in foundational literacy and math.

Early Literacy: Heggerty

GMPS uses the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Pre-K curriculum as a brief, explicit part of our early literacy program. Children learn to hear and work with the sounds in spoken language through engaging oral routines.

- ✓ rhyming and listening for sounds
- ✓ blending and segmenting sounds
- ✓ playing with language in short teacher-led lessons
- ✓ connecting sound awareness to books, songs, names, and classroom print

Early Math: Built for GMPS

We developed our own developmentally appropriate preschool math curriculum, tailored specifically to our students, classrooms, and program. Teachers introduce important concepts and offer children many ways to use them naturally throughout the day.

- ✓ counting and comparing quantities
- ✓ patterns, sorting, shapes, and spatial reasoning
- ✓ measurement, graphing, and number games
- ✓ using math while building, cooking, exploring, and solving problems

Why not just push academics earlier?

Because preschoolers learn differently from older children. Research supports a balanced approach: children benefit from active, playful learning along with intentional teacher guidance and appropriately timed direct instruction.

What research tells us

The American Academy of Pediatrics describes play as supporting social-emotional, cognitive, language, and self-regulation skills. A 2022 systematic review of 39 studies found guided play had advantages over direct instruction for some early math, shape, and task-switching outcomes. Research comparing highly didactic and child-centered preschool approaches also suggests that an early academic bump does not automatically mean stronger motivation or longer-term school outcomes.

Kindergarten readiness is more than letters and numbers

A strong preschool foundation includes early academic skills - and the ability to use them as part of a much bigger set of learning behaviors.

- ✓ communicate ideas and needs
- ✓ listen and participate in a group
- ✓ solve problems and ask for help
- ✓ manage frustration and transitions
- ✓ work independently and with others
- ✓ persist when something is difficult
- ✓ make friends and cooperate
- ✓ approach new experiences with confidence

We believe play is the most efficient driver of learning for young children.

Want to learn more?

NAEYC - Developmentally Appropriate Practice - Why play-based, joyful, intentional learning is central to high-quality early childhood practice.

American Academy of Pediatrics - The Power of Play - A parent-friendly research overview of how play supports development, executive function, and school readiness.

Skene et al. (2022) - Guided Play Research Review - A systematic review of 39 studies comparing guided play with direct instruction and free play.

Marcon (2002) - Preschool Approach & Later School Success - A longitudinal study exploring relationships between preschool instructional approach and later school outcomes.