The Eliot-Pearson Children's School is the laboratory-demonstration school affiliated with the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University. The school serves as a model and demonstration facility, providing a training and observation site for new and experienced teachers, as well as a research facility for faculty and supervised students in the Department of Child Development. The Children’s School enrolls approximately 80 children. It has preschool and kindergarten to second grade classes that vary in length and frequency.

History
The Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development and the Children’s School began in 1922 as the Ruggles Street School and Training Center, established by Abigail Adams Eliot with assistance from Mrs. Henry Greenleaf Pearson. As one of the first nursery schools in this country, the Ruggles Street School became a natural training ground for preschool teachers. It also served as a research site for those interested in learning about typical, healthy, active young children - an interest that had emerged with the establishment of child development as a field of study. In 1926 the Ruggles Street School became the Nursery Training School of Boston, reflecting its primary focus on teacher training. Then, in 1951, it was affiliated with Tufts University, and teachers were able to pursue their college education in conjunction with training in a preschool setting. In 1964, the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study was formally established, with the Children’s School as its laboratory-demonstration facility. The School and Department have a long history of providing the highest quality of early learning to children at the same time as in depth training to the students of the Department.

Admissions Policy
The goal of the admissions process is to determine whether Eliot-Pearson Children’s School can meet a child’s needs and the family’s expectations. We make every effort to inform families about the educational philosophy of our program and about the expectation that families become involved in school-sponsored activities. We try to develop collaboration with every family in order to support the home-school-child relationship.

All admissions decisions are based on the criteria listed below:

**Commitment to Diversity** – The Eliot-Pearson Children’s School actively seeks a student population that represents a wide range of racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds. We seek and value diversity within our family population, and do not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnic and national origin, cultural heritage, color, political beliefs, marital status, religion, disabilities, sexual orientation, or family style in the administration of the Children’s School admissions and educational policies, financial assistance programs, or any school administered program. All benefits and privileges are available to every child and family. Appreciation and respect for all people, regardless of their differences and similarities is at the heart of our program.
Re-enrollment—Our first obligation is to the children already enrolled in the school. Families of children currently enrolled are asked to express their preferences in January for the following year; however, due to physical space limitations in each classroom, we cannot guarantee re-enrollment from year to year. The number of openings remaining in each group will be determined from the base of returning children. A non-refundable $650.00 deposit is required to hold a spot for each child.

Siblings—Whenever possible, priority is given to applicants who are siblings of children currently enrolled; however, acceptance is not guaranteed.

Special Rights—The Children’s School is committed to providing quality education for all children, and therefore, children with special rights are enrolled in all of our groups. In a model of inclusion, children who need therapy services receive them in the context of their school day whenever possible. We have a team of specialists who collaborate with teachers, families, and others who may be involved in setting goals for children with special rights. Every attempt is made to collaborate with school systems to secure the services required for children and families. The Children’s School serves a wide spectrum of learning differences and all decisions are made on an individual basis.

Tufts Faculty, Staff, and Students—Consideration is given to families who are part of the Tufts community.

Class Composition—Applicants who will add to the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the school’s population are given priority whenever possible. Age and gender are considerations as they relate to the overall composition of each class.

Age Guidelines—The minimum age for enrollment is 2.9 by September 1. General age guidelines for groups include:
- Preschool East- 2.9 to 3.9 years old
- Preschool West- 3.9 to 4.8 years old
- Afternoon Preschool- 2.9 to 4 years old
- Kindergarten- Age 5 by December 31st
- First/Second Grade- 5.9 to 7 years old

Dates/Deadlines—While applications are accepted throughout the year, families interested in the school should submit an application in the fall, no earlier than one year in advance of the September they want their child to begin school. A $15.00 non-refundable application fee is requested to support our scholarship fund. Most admissions decisions are made in March, but openings occur when families’ move or parents change their plans.

Observations—We encourage all prospective families to visit the school during the application process. Families are welcome to visit the School after October 15 and may observe more than one classroom, if unsure about which class to request for placement. Please call the School at least one week in advance to schedule an observation time.
(Because observation booths are not sound proof, we request that parents do not bring
their children at this time.) You should also feel free to schedule a meeting with the
Director, Debbie LeeKeenan, or the Associate Director/Special Rights Coordinator,
Maryann O’Brien.

**Financial Assistance**—Admissions decisions are made separate and apart from
financial aid decisions. Financial assistance is based on need and the availability of
funds. Our policy is to support as many families as possible rather than award large
grants to a few families. It is expected every family will contribute something toward
their tuition. To be eligible for an Eliot-Pearson Children’s School scholarship you must
be under the 100% Massachusetts state median income (100% SMI). Applications for
scholarship may be requested upon acceptance to the Children’s School. The
Scholarship committee will keep all information confidential and financial aid decisions
are made in the spring. There are two exceptions to the non-refundable $650
enrollment deposit: 1) If a family pre-qualifies to receive financial aid, but does not
receive the financial assistance needed for their child to attend Eliot-Pearson, 2) If a
special education team recommends a class placement other than EPCS after re-
enrollment takes place. For more information, please see the school directors or school
coordinator.

**Final Decisions**—Final admissions decisions are made by the Director after close
consultation with the Associate Director/Special Rights Coordinator, and
Teaching Staff.

**Acceptance Procedures**—Once accepted, a non-refundable $650.00 deposit is
required and an enrollment contract is signed.

**PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY**
First and foremost we aim to create a quality, nurturing experience for all children and
their families. In addition, as a lab program we are involved in the ongoing training and
supervision of our graduate teaching assistants, student teachers and field workers. By
creating a quality early childhood experience for children, we are providing a first-hand
example of excellence to our adult-student participants. In addition, a great deal of time
is spent providing further training through supervision meetings, team meetings, and
workshops/discussions throughout the year. Everyone on our staff takes professional
development very seriously. It is one of the benchmarks of excellence in this program.
We all take time to further our own training and knowledge through regular
participation in staff meetings, on-site workshops, attendance at professional
conferences, and on our staff training days.

The inclusion of ongoing professional development keeps us all fresh, open to new
ideas, and committed to the highest standards in the fields of early education and child
development. Everyone benefits directly from the staffs' continuing education. However, to put this model into action requires days when children are not in attendance, so that extended time can be devoted to in service training.

Our program reflects a developmental approach to early education. The Head Teachers,
all of whom hold master's degrees in early education and have years of teaching
experience, create classrooms in which each child can be physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually challenged and engaged in meaningful activity. Through spontaneous, structured, and integrated play opportunities, teachers and children stimulate problem-solving, creativity, and learning. This play milieu encourages children to dynamically interact with materials, their peers, and teachers. These hands-on, constructive explorations nurture and promote children's self-esteem, confidence, sense of wonder, and natural passion for learning.

We are also committed to valuing individual differences and actively include children and families with a wide variety of racial, ethnic, family, religious, economic and cultural orientations, as well as children with a range of special needs. We believe that it is only by providing and supporting diversity within our classroom that we can enable children and adults to value the richness and importance of a multicultural education and world. Opportunities for exploring the similarities and variation between the children are an integral and important part of the curriculum. Our goal is to take an active stand against any type of bias, and to instill a genuine appreciation and acceptance of one another.

Many of the same materials and activity areas are incorporated within each of our classrooms. These materials and activities may include unit blocks, hollow blocks, small manipulatives like legos, puzzles, hands-on math materials, painting, clay, crafts, woodworking, dramatic play, sand and water, children's literature, writing, drawing, scrounge materials, music making/listening, movement, physical and natural science exploration, and computers (K-2nd grade). There are plenty of opportunities for playing and working alone and with other children and teachers, as well as several times a day for playing outside. In general, the level of complexity, problem-solving, and the role of the teachers will vary depending upon the developmental needs of the children.

**Guiding Principles For Learning**

1. **How Children Learn**
   Children learn best from self-initiated activity with concrete objects. They build on previous knowledge through repeated experiences. Through social interactions with peers, children learn to collaborate, cooperate and to understand another point of view. Children who are active in their own learning process make sense of the world for themselves and construct their own ideas. By having choices and making decisions, children learn to be in control of their own learning and to be independent thinkers. Children need to be presented with a variety of materials, strategies and approaches because not every child learns the same way.

2. **How Curriculum Develops**
   Curriculum in our program develops through an interactive process between the child, teacher and the environment. In each group there is a balance between teacher-planned activities and those activities that emerge from the children’s interests, abilities, and needs. There is a balance between individual, small group and large group experiences. Curriculum is based on inquiry, problem solving, and discovery and application of key issues and concepts. Curriculum points to connections within and across disciplines characterized by project-
based authentic learning, which allows for more in-depth study of topics. We strive to have all children’s learning be integrated, active and meaningful. Our teachers are co-facilitators of learning. They act as mentor-companions... observing, reflecting, collaborating, adapting, intervening, scaffolding, problem-solving, and building upon each child’s questions or ideas, as well as assessing the level and interest of each child in order to make informed decisions. Assessment of learning is both a process and a tool to improve instruction and document children’s growth.

3. Creation Of Partnerships With Family
The family is an essential part of our community and crucial to our genuine understanding and appreciation of each child. We strive to build home-school partnerships that are collaborative, trusting, and respectful. Parents and staff regularly communicate through frequent interactions, phone conversations, open houses, parent conferences, parent workshops, written reports, school gatherings, home-visits, and parent participation. Getting to know the values and cultures within families helps nurture the home-school relationship and contributes to the child’s self-esteem. Having parents participate in the goal-setting process is an important part of developing curriculum for the individual child.

4. Importance Of The Individual And The Community
Each child is unique. The curriculum focuses on supporting the growth of the whole child, including social-emotional, language, cognitive, and physical development. We believe that children go through stages of development, which are marked by general characteristics, but we also recognize the range of individual and cultural variation. Yet each individual child is also a member of a community that includes the family, the classroom, the school and the world at large. Building this sense of community takes conscious planning and ongoing effort. Our goal is to make each child feel a valued member of the community and to develop a sense of empathy and caring for others.

5. Respects and Appreciation of Differences
Our school perspective involves creating a classroom and school environment which respects and supports all dimensions of human differences, including cultural, linguistic, ability, learning style, ethnicity, family culture, gender, age, and socio-economic differences. In curriculum this perspective is attained by using materials that support diversity and integrate similarities and differences into the daily life of the classroom. We also adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners, differentiating instruction for the members of the group. Activities have multiple entry points where children can be working on the same activity but with different materials, goals and objectives. The school has an anti-bias education stance.
General Description of School Programs

Preschool Groups

Preschool East - (2.9 – 3.9 years old) Five mornings: M-F, (8:30 am –12:30 pm)
Preschool West - (3.9 – 4.8 years old) Five mornings: M-F, (8:30 –12:30pm)
Afternoon Preschool - (3 and 4 year olds) Two afternoons: T, Th (1:30-4:00pm)

Children are assisted with leave-taking so both the child and the parent feel comfortable and knowledgeable about the classroom routine, expectations, and range of activities. Children are able to explore a variety of activities and materials and are encouraged to use tools appropriately and express their thoughts and needs to teachers and other children. The establishment of positive and enjoyable relationships with other children is stressed. Children are supported in their attempts to initiate play, cooperate with others, and negotiate conflicts successfully. Pre-literacy and math skills are fostered in classroom experiences which acknowledge the intense social concerns of children of this age. Emphasis is placed on verbal expression of ideas in a group, in depth planning, and problem-solving tasks.

Kindergarten
(Must be 5 by December 31) Monday through Friday 8:30-12:30

First/Second Grade
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 8:30-3:00; Wednesday 8:30-12:30

Both the Kindergarten and the First/Second Grade Classes seek to establish a community in which mutual respect for one another's backgrounds, experiences, ideas and concerns is a priority. The cooperative learning atmosphere will enable the children to work and play together productively. The curriculum will integrate literacy, mathematics, natural, physical and social sciences, and the arts. The rhythm of each day will include large group gatherings, small study groups, independent work periods, outdoor play, and a significant block of time during which children may pursue their own interests and develop friendships. Within the context of our developmental classrooms, each child will be encouraged to experience the joy of productivity, expressivity, mastery, friendship and enhanced self-esteem.

Extended Day Program
An extended day option is offered on five afternoons Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday until 3:00 PM for children in the Morning Preschool and Kindergarten programs. This program provides children of different ages an opportunity to interact in a nurturing and stimulating environment. Additional outdoor time, quiet time, and activity time is provided

Summer Program
A 6-week summer program is normally offered each summer. Information about this program is available in February.
Special Rights Program

The Children's School is committed to providing quality education to all children. At the heart of our philosophy is the belief that all children come to us with their particular unique needs, and within our population of children, there will be some who require more focused, consistent attention in particular areas of development.

We believe that children with special rights should not be taken out of their classroom for the delivery of their special services. Children do not need to be segregated from their friends, teachers and familiar room to get the quality of assistance they need. Rather, we believe that it is every child's right to be fully included in the classroom, and whenever possible, the approaches and strategies need to accommodate to the individual therapeutic requirements of each child. This is at the heart of developmental education.

All children have rights and are full of potential. They are competent, full of life, powerful, and not needy. Using the term “rights” over “needs” emphasizes the special qualities each child brings. While studying the municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, we learned about their use of the phrase “special rights” to describe children with special needs or “children with disabilities,” the term used by the MA and US Departments of Education. We are using the term “special rights” at the Children's School, as it captures our beliefs about children with learning differences.

To the greatest extent possible we attempt to deliver the therapies in the classroom, so that the skills acquired are functional for the child instead of isolated skills that are practiced in the therapy room and nowhere else. At the Children's School it is common to observe a therapist in the classroom engaged in a highly motivating activity with a child identified with special rights as well as several of his/her classmates. This model of including the support in the classroom is a conscious departure from traditional models of mainstreaming and integration. It also requires a carefully orchestrated collaboration between all individuals involved with any given child. This teamwork approach enables us to support the full inclusion of children with special rights in the classrooms.

Occasionally, therapeutic interventions may need to occur outside the classroom. This is most often due to equipment needed for therapy (such as a swing or large therapy ball) or the need to address a sensory, motor, or specific speech or language issue in a less stimulating environment than the classroom. In some instances, a classmate of a child with special rights may be invited to participate in a given therapy session. For children without special rights, this is a voluntary opportunity to spend time with a skilled occupational, physical, or speech and language therapist and a classmate. The activities are fun and engaging and children are usually eager to participate. The sessions usually last about 30 minutes. If not in the classroom, the therapist will work in Room 118, the therapists’ office, located near the Grade 1/2 classroom, or in the Curriculum Lab.

In addition to our teaching staff we are fortunate to have a team of specialists, who collaborate with the teachers, families, and all others who may be involved in setting goals for the children identified with special rights. Coordinating the team is our Associate Director/Special Rights Coordinator, Maryann O'Brien. She serves as liaison
with public school systems that may refer children to the Children's School, and meets
regularly with parents, therapists, and classroom teachers around the programming
needs for the children with special rights. Specialists include occupational therapists,
speech and language therapists, physical therapists, and a mental health consultant. At
times there is also a teacher of the vision impaired/orientation and mobility instructor,
a behavioral specialist, and other specialists. Whenever possible, every attempt is made
to coordinate with school systems to secure the services required for children and
families.

Children with special rights are enrolled in all of our groups. Some are referred to us
through public school systems. Sometimes parents enter the Children's School with
questions and concerns about their child's development or share the findings from an
outside evaluation. Sometimes a child’s teacher raises questions about the progress of a
particular child. In this case teachers will bring up their questions to the Special Rights
Coordinator and/or Director, who will then observe the child in the classroom. If a
decision is reached that there are concerns, which warrant further analysis, these will be
shared with the child's parents. If, at any time, parents have concerns about their child's
development, they can request additional input from the Special Rights Coordinator. In
the event that an outside referral is recommended or required, this will be
communicated to parents.

Our commitment to children and families with special rights is an important part of our
effort to serve diverse populations. It is our hope that everyone will honor the range of
differences and provide equitably for all children and families. We know this is an
important value to promote, and one that is essential for children to believe as our
world becomes increasingly more diverse. Appreciation and respect for all people,
regardless of their differences and similarities, is at the heart of our program.

As a private program, we receive no state or federal funding to support our special
rights program. In the event that a child requires special services or regular monitoring,
there are additional fees to cover the cost of the therapeutic services. Whenever possible,
we encourage families to work with their community school system to get the special
services available through the public school. If that is not possible, families will assume
the cost of agreed upon services. We are not making any profit from the special rights
program. If you have any questions, concerns, or ideas share them with the Special
Rights Coordinator or Director.

NOTE: We are not considered a Private Special Education MA Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education approved school, because we are an inclusion
setting -- not a school exclusively for children with special rights. Therefore, if you seek
funding from your public school system you may run into difficulty, especially for
children eligible for kindergarten or older.
Specialist Roles

Speech/Language Pathologist (S/LP), Certificate of Clinical Competency
The S/LP at the Eliot-Pearson Children’s School provides expertise to the children and staff regarding social-communication, speech production, and receptive & expressive language development, delay, and disorder. The S/LP identifies and addresses identified students’ social/play readiness, skill related prerequisites, primary communicative modes and functions, receptive and expressive language (both spoken and written) and speech production. Meeting the student’s individualized needs is the goal within an inclusive format. Flexibility for direct work is available as deemed appropriate. Peer participation and modeling is fostered to support understanding of social-communicative differences, facilitate acceptance, generate friendships, and enhance generalization of skills targeted within functional social school contexts.

Occupational Therapist/Registered (OT/R)
Occupational Therapists provide expertise regarding children’s fine motor and sensory skills. Fine motor skills require eye-hand coordination and adequate muscle tone, strength, and flexibility for young children’s work, leading to writing. The system of sensory processing and sensory integration addresses the interpretation of environmental information and the resulting behaviors. Children who have issues around sensory processing may require specific interventions to allow them to be part of a group setting. OT’s work with many children who struggle with the impact of noise, classroom activity, tolerance to touch, flexibility around routines and strong aversions to certain tastes or odors. OT’s provide assistance to teachers and families around making adaptations and accommodations in the environment and are regularly seen in the classrooms.

Physical Therapist (PT)
PTs work with children to develop gross motor skills, balance, strength, and movement. PTs at the Children’s School may lead a group of children on scooter boards, obstacle courses, therapeutic swinging, or engaging in outdoor games. They provide suggestions to teachers and parents regarding participation in both the social and physical aspects of play. Proper seating equipment is provided to support body posture to facilitate children’s attention and learning as well as promote optimal physical development.

All of the specialists provide direct services to children, provide consultation to families and teachers, and monitor progress in an ongoing manner. By working in the classroom, whenever possible, the specialists facilitate inclusion and early childhood development. Specific intervention strategies are modeled on a regular basis and can be used by teachers in an ongoing manner. Consultation is used to develop classroom adaptation strategies as well as to support children who have been identified as having learning differences.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FAMILIES ASK ABOUT INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL RIGHTS

1. What is inclusion? How is it defined at EPCS?

At the Children’s School, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of our efforts and beliefs. We define inclusion to mean the creation of a classroom and school community that respects and supports all dimensions of human differences, including culture, linguistic, ability, learning styles, ethnicity, family culture, religion, gender, age, and socio-economic. We do this by valuing our similarities as well as our differences. Inclusion of children with learning differences is one aspect of inclusion.

This noble goal is not always easy to put into practice in a school. It is not enough to just bring people together in the same building from different walks of life; it involves creating a community culture that supports a range of differences including different opinions, values, and perspectives. It involves listening carefully to others, learning from each other, and being able to agree to disagree in non-judgmental ways.

The purpose of this document it to address questions that families raise about inclusion of children with special rights.

2. What is it like to have a child attend an inclusion school?

An inclusion school can provide a safe environment where questions can be both asked and answered. Children are encouraged to take notice of their peers’ strengths and expertise and at the same time to learn that everyone is working on doing something better. It is a place where differences are normalized and families can be proud of their uniqueness. Exposure to differences and open discussion can lead to greater acceptance of the unfamiliar and build a strong community. Families are exposed to a team approach where children are at the center of the team. In an inclusion school parents help to insure that all of the children’s needs are met, not only the needs of their own child. Families make extra efforts to learn about the unique qualities within other families at the school. There are life-long benefits for children and their families.

3. What types of special rights do children have at EPCS?

There are children in each classroom at the Children’s School who have both “visible and invisible” special rights. Each child with identified special rights has an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) written in conjunction with the child’s school district. The IEP includes strengths, goals, and therapeutic interventions that will help the child to attain the goals. Some of the visible special rights may include cerebral palsy, blindness, hearing impairment, or Down syndrome. Other special rights such as communication delays, behavioral or emotional needs may not be as visible to the greater community. Some children’s learning differences are identified after they enroll at the Children’s School. We work closely with families and their local public school for evaluations and services.

4. Why do you say “special rights” rather than special needs?

All children have rights and are full of potential. They are competent, full of life, powerful, and not needy. Using the term “rights” over “needs” emphasizes the special qualities each child brings. While studying the municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia,
Italy, we learned about their use of the phrase “special rights” to describe children with special needs or “disabilities,” the term used by the MA and US Departments of Education. We are using this term at the Children’s School, as it captures our beliefs about children with learning differences.

5. How many children with special rights are in any given class?
There is no designated number of children in each class with special rights. We feel there is value in all children learning together and we feel well equipped to serve children with special rights, having many years of experience, specialists on staff, teachers who have coursework and experience with children with special rights, and a coordinator for this program. There are two teachers in each classroom throughout the year and Tufts students during specific times. At times, a child may have an Individual Education Plan that calls for an Instructional Aide. The Instructional Aide interacts with all of the children in the class to support inclusion.

6. Can I find out about which children have special rights and what their differences are?
State and federal laws that protect their confidentiality protect children with special rights. Staff members discuss a child’s learning issues only with the child’s parents. Families often have strong ideas about how and when they want to share information about their child’s special rights. At times, some parents have written a letter to the other parents in their child’s classroom to give them information that will support friendships, classroom interactions and play dates outside of school. The letters may address dietary restrictions, facilitating peer interactions, safety issues and general medical information. The letters are appreciated and have been excellent resources for the school community. Other families prefer to keep information about their child private, until they are ready to share more openly with the classroom or school community. It is our policy to take the lead from families and to provide support in their decisions about disclosing individual needs. Classroom teachers and school administrators are good resources for helping to share information when families are ready to do so.

7. What can I do as a parent when my child asks questions about children’s differences?
Children are taught through concrete experiences coupled with emotional events. To demystify differences, provide children with simple, straightforward answers to their questions in a direct, matter-of-fact, brief manner. Listen carefully to what children are asking and what they are feeling. While it is important to not over respond, don’t ignore their questions, sidestep, change the subject or admonish the child for asking a question. Be aware that often children are asking how the difference will affect them. Feel free to discuss this with your child’s teacher.

8. How are children with special rights identified?
Some children enter EPCS with an IEP (individualized education program) which provides them with specific therapy and/or special education services. Other children may have unidentified learning differences. Teachers work with families and the special rights coordinator to decide if additional information is needed to best support children’s growth and development in a classroom environment. At times implementing instructional support services such as adjusting teaching methodologies
or materials may be all that is necessary. At other times requesting an evaluation through the school district or the pediatrician may be recommended. Following the evaluation process a team meeting is held which includes the family, EPCS teacher and special rights coordinator, as well as those who evaluated the child.

9. Can I be sure that my child will receive attention from the teacher?
The teacher-student ratio allows children to receive the attention he/she needs when they need it. In addition, there are specialists such as occupational, physical and speech/language therapists who work in the classroom with children with Individual Education Plans, who have identified special rights and their peers. All children benefit from their expertise. All children need attention at different times of the day and for different areas of the curriculum.

10. How can teachers meet the needs of diverse learners? How can teachers structure activities so that children with varying abilities can participate?
Teachers have extensive training and ongoing professional development. The process of meeting the needs of a wide range of learners in the classroom is called “differentiated instruction.” In this kind of classroom, learning environments are carefully and deliberately designed to address the diversity of learning styles, levels of readiness and interests within any group of children. The curriculum is varied with multiple entry points, and multiple learning materials to address a range of learners. Flexibility is a hallmark of a differentiated classroom, what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed are done in different ways depending on the strengths and needs of the learner.

11. How does the school support subtle or invisible differences?
The adults in the classroom demonstrate that they value diversity and support children in comfortably interacting with differences- whether the differences are obvious or more subtle. There are children in every classroom with invisible learning differences. Obvious differences like a person in a wheelchair, or person who is blind or deaf, are often easier for children to understand. They can see a child is in a wheelchair, and a simple explanation such as, “their legs do not work like yours so they use a wheelchair to move around” makes sense. Other kinds of differences like a child with emotional or behavioral problems, or a child who has difficulty sitting still and listening to a story because they have a shorter attention span are often harder for children to understand. Teachers use simple language to explain all kinds of differences. They talk with children about what is best to support each child’s learning i.e. “Maia uses the bean bag chair so she can listen to the story better.” Or “Tom is taking a break now to calm down and will come back when he is ready to join the group.” When explanations are given in very matter of fact and natural way, children learn to accept we all have differences and this is what we need to do. In the beginning of the year children and teachers also generate basic rules of respect together for the classroom that encompasses all kinds of differences.

12. Who can answer my questions about inclusion at EPCS?
Parents can raise questions with the classroom teacher, director and associate director. If there does not seem to be a good time to talk when you bring your child to school, you may email, leave a note, or call and suggest some good times to talk. There are also
resources available through the Parent Teacher Advisory Board (PTAB) and the Friends and Families of Children with Special Rights Group.

13. Where can I get more information about inclusion?
The parent resource library near the front desk is a good place to begin. There are books that are about specific diagnosis such as ADHD, Asperger’s Syndrome, cerebral palsy, language development and sensory processing disorder. Parent-Teacher Advisory Board meetings often focus on inclusion. The Friends and Families of Children with Special Rights group, often called The Friends Group, meets monthly and invites participation from the EP community. Many families welcome inquiries about their child’s special rights and are wonderful resources to the school community. Families who have been at the school in previous years may also be good resources.

Louise Derman-Sparks, Maria Gutierrez and Carol Phillips, Teaching Young Children to Resist Bias. NAEYC. 1989

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