

Early Learning

At Whittle, we believe that children have limitless potential and seek to belong, learn, solve problems and create. Joyous exploration, creative expression, personalized pathways and community contribution are the key features of our program. It is our wish that early learners love learning and continue to develop their ability to care—to care for truth and learning; to care for their health and well-being; and to care for others, for the world around them, for nature and for the good that they can bring.

Our ELC curriculum is based on the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which views children as infinitely capable, teachers as co-constructors of learning and families as close partners. A Reggio-based approach follows the interests of children. For example, a teacher who noticed that students loved moving their bodies in creative ways could build a series of learning opportunities out of that interest: that teacher might show students videos of acrobats or modern dancers in action, bring in a specialist to lead a creative movement class, or ask the children to make acrobatic shapes out of clay. Each experience builds upon and reacts to the developing needs of the students.

ELC SAMPLE DAY SCHEDULE

TIME	FOCUS
7:00-8:00 a.m.	Extended Day Program
8:00-8:45 a.m.	Welcome, Arrival & Exploration Time
8:45-9:30 a.m.	Community Meeting
9:30-10:45 a.m.	Project Work
10:45-11:30 a.m.	Outside Exploration
11:30-12:30 p.m.	Lunch & Storytime
12:30-1:30 p.m.	Rest (three- & four-year-olds) or Workshop Time (five- & six-year-olds)
1:30-2:15 p.m.	Special Classes (Gardening, Movement Music or Physical Literacy)
2:15-2:30 p.m.	Community Meeting
2:30-6:30 p.m.	Dismissal and Extended Day Program

ESSENTIAL PRACTICES



CHILDREN FOLLOW PERSONALIZED LEARNING PATHWAYS

We focus on the holistic development of the child- guiding a personalized connection to the world of knowledge, the world of self and the world of humanity.



CURRICULUM EMERGES FROM THE CHILDREN

With Reggio Emilia inspiration, we use emergent, project-based curriculum to co-create with children, observing and listening to them, and constantly evolving learning experiences. Students and teachers together self-reflect and iterate.



TEACHERS ARE LEARNERS AND RESEARCHERS

We value teacher learning as much as student learning. We encourage teachers to construct personalized professional development pathways and encounter the world with the same curiosity, interest and wonder as the children they teach.



CHILDREN ENJOY IMMERSIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

At this age, the primary emphasis is on the spoken language and its cultural context, with a view to enabling students to participate actively and comfortably in a Chinese cultural environment. Students will have daily exposure to spoken Chinese through activities, stories, rhymes, songs and games.



THE CLASSROOM IS EVERYWHERE

The physical environment teaches. Daily, we use the broader physical and digital world as our classroom, for inclusive and culturally dynamic learning.



FAMILIES ARE CLOSE PARTNERS

We engage families as partners to develop joyous learning at school and at home, and to help strengthen the network of support.

WELCOME, ARRIVAL AND EXPLORATION

Depending on weather, children will be welcomed each morning by their teachers on the playground or in the classroom. Students who participate in the Extended Day Program (a flexible option for parents who may need additional care hours before or after the traditional school day) will join their classmates arriving from home at this time.

If the day begins outside, they will have the opportunity to choose from a variety of activities, including riding tricycles, climbing, building and drawing with chalk. If the day begins inside, they can begin exploring the classroom: perhaps revisiting a structure in the building area from the day before, returning to a book in the library area that they wanted to read again, or surveying the room for new materials just introduced during yesterday's exploration. Children will talk with their friends, reconnect with their teachers and begin to settle into the start of their day.

COMMUNITY MEETING

At 9:00 A.M., the morning community meeting begins. Children will engage in activities that help them get to know one another, talk about what they did yesterday and discuss plans for the day ahead. At the beginning of the school year, the focus of the meeting might be getting to know a new area of the classroom, such as the mini-atelier (the Reggio Emilia term for the art studio). Here, students will find a variety of tools for expressing themselves creatively, including clay, paint, wire and found materials. On some days, students might embark on a tour of the building—perhaps to the kitchen, where they will meet the food service team and learn about basic nutrition and how different lunch dishes are prepared.

PROJECT WORK

During project work time, children deeply explore a new subject. For example: if the project of the day is construction and architecture, different areas of the room would be set up to inspire students to think about this topic in different ways. In the block-building area, photographs of the Whittle campus and other buildings in the immediate neighborhood might inspire students to build models of different types of buildings using a wide variety of materials. In the classroom library, books about construction, architecture and homes will be set out. Children will be able to choose where they want to work. During this time, there might be a group of children working in the pretend play area on a blueprint of a restaurant or some other type of building that they voted on together. During this time, snack will also be available as a choice, allowing children to come and eat when they are ready. (Extended day students may want to eat right in the beginning; those who just ate breakfast at home might choose to eat later.) Snack time is a moment to talk with friends as well as a great opportunity to incorporate simple math problems, such as counting out ten pretzels or measuring out a $1/2$ cup of water.

OUTSIDE EXPLORATION

We will be going outside every day. We will help make sure that every child has the necessary attire so that outdoor exploration is fun and safe no matter the weather conditions. Typical outdoor time will include a variety of options, such as group games, free play, nature exploration, gardening and more. Some days we will take walks into the neighborhood to explore Rock Creek Park or visit the University of DC's rooftop garden.

LUNCH AND STORYTIME

Lunch will be served family style to foster social connections and immersive conversation in Chinese. We plan to invite older students, Chinese-speaking parents and our Chinese teachers to join us. English-speaking parents who are interested in learning and speaking Chinese with the children will be welcome as well. At the end of lunch, story time acts as a transition into rest time.

REST AND REFLECTION

We anticipate an approximately one-hour rest period for our three- to four-year-olds. This time will be personalized to meet the needs of the children.

WORKSHOP TIME

This will be time for the five- to six-year-olds to deepen their learning from the morning, work in small groups, assess progress and set goals, or explore personal projects. This time will be personalized to meet the needs and interests of the children.

OUTSIDE EXPLORATION, GARDENING, PHYSICAL LITERACY, MOVEMENT AND MUSIC

In the afternoons, specialized teachers will provide a variety of experiences, such as exploring a nearby rooftop garden or working with STEM specialists on basic engineering projects in the mini atelier, based on a rotating schedule.

CLOSING MEETING

For about 15 minutes at the end of each day, teachers and students will reflect on the day, sing a closing song and look forward to the exploration to be continued tomorrow.

