

PRESCHOOL PREVIEW

Rye Presbyterian Nursery School

This fall is Rye Presbyterian Nursery School's 61st year educating, nurturing, and challenging children ages 2 through 5.

As a progressive preschool inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, RPNS provides a play-based, half-day program. As they listen to children's ideas, they



Teacher Lisa Keegan working with a small group of students in the 5s program on a literacy read-aloud.

build the curriculum. "We work collaboratively with children to create long-term projects and investigations around their ideas, delving deeper into what interests them," note co-directors Margaret Sculti and Kristin Kumar. "To prepare our students for elementary school, we integrate learning goals into our studies, so every child is nurtured, supported, and challenged. We have learning goals for each age group." RPNS families can choose morning and afternoon classes

that meet two, three, four, or five days a week and various extended-day programs are available. The staff includes two co-directors, 20 teachers, an art studio teacher, a school nurse, and a business manager. A music/movement teacher, physical education teacher, foreign language Spanish teacher, child psychologist, speech thera-



Families on the Brooklyn Bridge trip.



peutists, occupational therapist, and physical therapist provide additional support services. Children and staff enjoy ten beautiful classrooms, an art studio, two age-specific playgrounds, a bike track, an outdoor learning environment, a newly constructed woodworking shed, a "Great Lawn," two garden areas, and the use of two large meeting spaces in Rye Presbyterian Church.

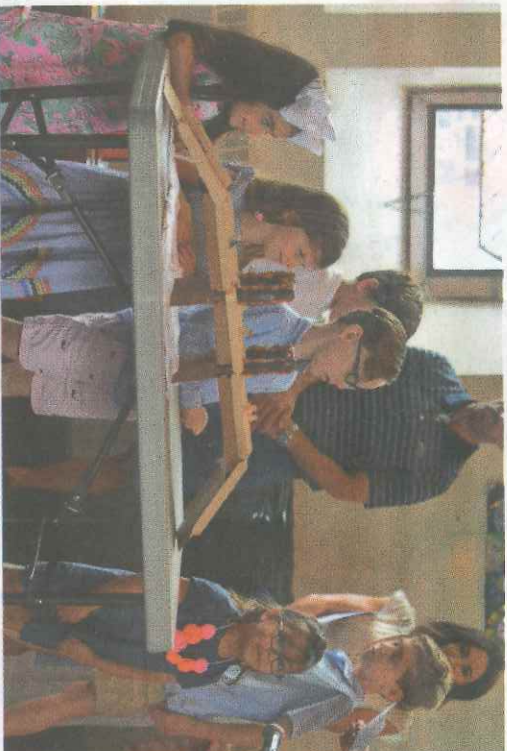
In their classrooms, they use the "project approach" to teaching where professionals guide the stu-

dents through in-depth studies of real-world topics. This approach to teaching builds self-esteem as it shows children their ideas and questions are important and valued. Teachers do not just give children answers, but instead work with them to research a topic. As the teachers take a journey of learning with their class, the students see that adults are learners too, and this fosters an appreciation of life-long learning.

While engaging in in-depth studies on a particular topic, the children are given opportunities

and Golden Gate bridges, to name a few. Fascinated by the difference in the architecture of bridges near and far, they began to research the types, locations, and materials used to create them. Deep discussions took place as the children researched and documented the composition of several bridges.

When students arrived at RPNS one morning, a message on the white board piqued their interest: "What do you know about suspension bridges?" It turned out a lot. They came up with common materials that included: brick, metal,



Two of the bridge models created by RPNS students.



to gain more understanding and expand their knowledge. "Children are natural researchers; as they learn, they question, experiment, and reflect," notes Ms. Kumar. "Giving the students the chance to interview 'experts' in their field of study allows them to access new and meaningful information. We connect them with resources in the community that enhance their learning experience."

Here is a glimpse of a curriculum experience from the 2018-2019 school year from the directors.

The students in the Fives showed an interest in bridges as a topic of focus. Many were excited to report that they had traveled over the Brooklyn, George Washington,

steel, wood, and stone. Next, the students stressed the importance of railings. One student pointed out that the wires and/or cables used in suspension bridges needed to be tight.

The class continued to study suspension bridges, and the teachers projected images of both the Brooklyn Bridge and the new Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge over the block area. The children came to class excited to see these images projected on the wall and wanted to build right away. They took the time to look closely at the images and made a number of observations. Many of the Fives recognized the arch shapes on the Brooklyn Bridge. The class compared them to the

very straight lines of the Governor Cuomo Bridge. The students were deliberate when picking shapes for their bridges, many finding the arches they needed to replicate the image projected overhead. The Fives also spoke about the wires or cables that both bridges had in common. Finally, the children noticed the different materials used to build each bridge — the Brooklyn Bridge was built with lots of bricks, the latter metal and steel.

With the interest in full swings, a class, split into two groups, traveled to the Brooklyn Bridge on a morning in May, where they were met by tour guides on the Brooklyn side of the bridge. The class walked to just about the middle and learned the following interesting facts.

- The Brooklyn Bridge was the first steel-wire suspension bridge.
- It took 14 years to build.
- It is 135 feet above the water so tall ships can pass.
- It was the longest bridge when it was built at 1,595 feet.
- Twenty-one elephants from Bannum Bailey Circus crossed the bridge to prove it was sturdy.
- It cost 1 penny to cross the bridge when it first opened.

This trip exemplified the power of child-centered learning. "It was so amazing to see the faces of the children as they approached and stepped onto the Brooklyn Bridge. It was a moment in the curriculum that students will long cherish," said Ms. Sculti.

Back in the classroom, students continued to study different kinds of bridges and they made various replicas. They used recycled materials to make the bridges their own. The children chose to be part of different bridge study groups and researched a number of varieties: pedestrian, draw, folding, and suspension. The students shared their extensive research with their families at their moving up ceremony in June.

When 4- and 5-year-old students return to RPNS this fall, they will be quickly immersed in a new streamlined literacy program that promotes a phonics approach to learning letter sounds, as well as, interactive, age-appropriate lessons on letter formation. Over the summer, all their teachers were trained in the Fundations Wilson Literacy Program. RPNS will supplement literacy lessons through games, songs, whole group/small group read-alouds, rhyming lessons, and journal writing.

Every year, RPNS raises money for the school's greatest need through their Parent Social, which will take place Friday, September 20 on the Great Lawn. Funds raised will support the transformation of all four children's sink basins in an effort to promote water conservation and sanitary practices. The sink basins will include automated faucets and soap dispensers.

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