

IX Child Care Program Plan

A. Supervision

It is the policy and practice at the Lake Superior Zoo School (LSZS) that all children are supervised by an approved staff person at *all* times, meaning that a child is always within sight and hearing of a staff person. Children are the responsibility of their parent/guardian or other authorized adult before the child is signed in and after the child is signed out each session on the sign-in/sign-out form located in the preschool classroom. At LSZS, all program adults are responsible for protecting the health and safety of all enrolled children, although teaching staff assigned to be “in ratio” have primary responsibility for continuous supervision of children enrolled.

B. Age Categories

LSZS serves preschool aged children. The MN Department of Health and Human Services in Chapter 9503.0005 defines a preschooler as a child who is at least 33 months old and who has not yet attended the first day of kindergarten. A child may be designated as a “preschooler” at the age of 31 months for purposes of staff ratios, group size, and child care programming, if the parent, teacher, and center director determine that the designation is in the best interests of the child. In general, to enroll in LSZS, children must be toilet trained and 3 years old by September 1st of the year in which they will enroll.

LSZS generally has up to 18 enrolled children on site at any given time. The program is full day with two teachers “in ratio” for the group of preschoolers. The MN State minimum staff to child ratio for preschool aged children is one staff member to 10 children (1:10) with a maximum group size of 20 children. In order to support our outdoor play and exploration, LSZS maintains a ratio of one teacher to nine or fewer children. This ratio does not include the presence of volunteers.

C. Days and Hours of Operation

LSZS is open Monday-Friday between the hours of 7:30 AM - 5:30 PM. LSZS operates year-round with two sessions: School-year Session and Summer Session. Families receive the LSZS calendar with enrollment materials. LSZS will be closed when the Duluth Public Schools (ISD #709) close due to severe weather.

D. General Education Methods

As a nature based preschool, LSZS brings together the tenants of high quality early childhood education and environmental education, with a focus on connecting young children to animals and nature for the benefit of both the child and the natural world. The preschool follows an emergent, play-based curriculum with opportunities for project based learning rooted in the children’s interests and developmental needs. Our program is guided by the principles of the North American Association for Environmental Education and Minnesota’s Early Learning Standards. Daily walking field trips in the zoo offer the children rich experiences with animals, nature play, and the zoo community.

E. Annual Evaluation

This Program Plan has been developed by the Preschool Director, who is a staff person qualified as a teacher under Minnesota Rules part 9503.0032. The Preschool Director evaluates this Program Plan in writing annually as required.

F. Goals and objectives

Goals for Social-Emotional Development

- Create a warm, safe, and nurturing climate where children feel valued and accepted unconditionally as important members of our classroom community.
- Establish relationships with a sense of trust and security in the classroom: child-child, child-teacher, and teacher-teacher.
- Establish routines, rules, and guidelines in the classroom that are clear and consistent.
- Encourage and support autonomous/independent action and thinking: problem-solving, decision-making, and self-help skills.
- Create opportunities for children to initiate and sustain play with a variety of peers and develop friendships, learning strategies for social problem solving and dealing with conflict.
- Facilitate children's development and use of play skills (initiating play, maintaining and extending play, turn-taking, negotiation, and compromise).
- Guide children toward increases in positive self-control, the ability to tolerate frustration, and social cognition.
- Facilitate children developing a positive self-concept, self-worth, and competence.
- Increase children's awareness and ability to identify, and appropriately express their own feelings and emotions.
- Promote children's willingness to try new experiences and take social and emotional risks.
- Develop children's empathetic awareness of others' feelings, understanding of how one's actions and words affect others, and how to respond appropriately to the needs and feelings of others.
- Facilitate children's emerging awareness and positive acceptance of their own and others' gender, ethnic identity, and culture.

Goals for Cognitive Development

- Foster in children a love of learning and a willingness to take intellectual risks.
- Facilitate children's ability to attend and persist in cognitive tasks, develop their working memory and cognitive flexibility (i.e. executive function skills).
- Encourage children to engage in exploring, touching, manipulating, investigating, questioning, and discovering the world around them.
- Facilitate children's interaction with materials and people, constructing knowledge and developing higher-order thinking skills, which lay the foundation for specific academic skill acquisition.
- Provide an environment rich in concrete objects, materials, and hands-on experiences so the children will have opportunities to gain first-hand knowledge and build meaning through the use of the five senses.

- Support children’s ability to relate observations, experiences, ideas, and feelings to others through conversations, dramatic play, painting, modeling, construction, and creative movement.
- Encourage children’s engagement in beginning mathematical, logical, and scientific higher-level thinking skills: 1:1 correspondence; matching/discriminating; part/whole relationship; quantifying (more/less, some/all, many/few, counting, etc.); grouping; classifying; ordering; observation skills; predicting; hypothesizing; cause/effect relationships; conserving; convergent/divergent thinking; measurement; spatial concepts; time concepts; and remembering/recalling.
- Increase knowledge of and abilities to use symbolic and representational systems such as numbers, alphabet letters, signals, signs, gestures, and facial expressions through engaging in role-taking as well as using dramatic play props, art media, blocks, books, paper/pencils, etc. to recreate or stand for another object or event.

Goals for Language/Literacy Development

- Help children become competent language users by expanding vocabulary and awareness of words, expanding the use of expressive language and mature speech patterns, and increasing listening and receptive skills.
- Encourage the social use of language through discussion and exploration of ideas, conversations, stories, games, and music experiences.
- Facilitate the ability to use language for various forms of communication: expressing needs, asking questions, getting and giving information, establishing and maintaining relationships, expressing feelings/thoughts/emotions, interpreting and reasoning about events, creating imaginary scenes, and playing with words and sounds.
- Encourage awareness of and beginning facility with the alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness and the relationship between speech and print.

Goals for Physical Development

- Encourage children to enjoy and enthusiastically engage in physical activities in both indoor and outdoor environments designed for large motor activity.
- Expand and enhance children’s physical abilities in fine motor coordination such as manual dexterity, eye-hand/eye-finger coordination, and object manipulation/control through increased participation and skill in activities such as using writing utensils, cutting with scissors, stringing beads, placing pegs in holes, etc.
- Expand and enhance children’s physical capabilities in large motor coordination: walking, running, jumping, hopping, pedaling, throwing, catching, kicking, climbing, and dancing.
- Develop children’s physical fitness: balance, coordination, endurance, strength, flexibility, and perception.
- Facilitate children’s management of relaxation and calming techniques to soothe themselves.
- Provide opportunities for children to become aware of and comfortable with their bodies: labeling parts, identifying functions, learning how bodies move through space, and participating in movement activities for enjoyment and creativity.
- Help children develop a willingness to take safe physical risks.

Goals for Creative Development

- Facilitate children’s curiosity and enjoyment of investigating new/unfamiliar situations, people, and materials.
- Facilitate children’s expression of unique and individual thoughts, ideas, and feelings through self-expressive, open-ended materials and activities, including, but not limited to, drawing, painting, sculpting, modeling, singing/playing musical instruments, moving/dancing.
- Encourage children’s interest in and enjoyment of fantasy and imaginative play.
- Foster novel use of resources and enjoyment of responding creatively to problems while reinforcing independent thinking and individuality.
- Increase children’s flexibility in thinking about events, materials, activities, and people by trying new things, making a guess, creating new ideas, etc.
- Encourage children’s enjoyment and expression of humor.

G. Cultural Sensitivity

LSZS preschoolers will participate in activities that promote their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development. These activities will be provided in a manner consistent with each child’s cultural background. There will be a mixture of quiet and active activities as well as a mixture of child-directed and adult-directed activities. Sample activities to promote a child’s development may include the following:

Physical development	Social development	Emotional development	Intellectual development
Running in the forest	Cooperative group games such as using a parachute	Quietly watching and listening to birds	Playing math and critical thinking games
Balancing on logs	Playing house or other imaginative games with other children	Seeing adults model appreciation of the natural world	Listening to stories read and told aloud
Jumping in puddles	Practicing sharing tools and toys in pretend play, while digging or while building	Discussions of empathy with animals, such as when stepping on an insect	Practicing creating letters with sticks
Dancing	Playing games such as follow the leader or Simon Says	Practicing putting on boots and coats independently	Reflecting on the events of the day
Manipulating crayons, markers, and paintbrushes	Watching out for each other as we walk in the woods	Cultural cooking events with families	Counting during transition time

H. Parent Conferences

LSZS’s assessment tool is the Work Sampling System, which is Parent Aware approved and aligned with MN early learning standards. The results of the assessment will be used in conjunction with ongoing informal assessment to individualize instruction. Children are observed and information recorded at least monthly in the child’s record. The results of the assessment(s) and observations (intellectual, physical, social, and emotional progress of each child) are shared with families during parent teacher conferences at least twice each school year and as requested.

I. Daily Schedule

Young children benefit from having a predictable schedule. LSZS maintains a loose schedule with predictable events such as whole group meeting, snack, and outdoor play time during each day. However, because of the emergent nature of our curriculum, LSZS may be flexible with this schedule depending on the weather, interests of the children, or special activities planned.

Sample Daily Schedule		Sample Activities
7:30-8:30	Arrival, Playscape Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child sign-in • Bathroom and dressing for outdoor play • Obstacle course with logs, stumps, etc. • Dramatic play, Construction, Sensory play
8:30-9:30	Zoo Walkabout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal observation and interaction • Interaction with zoo keepers • Prepare enrichment materials for animals
9:30-10:00	Bathroom, Breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing songs that encourage phonemic awareness • Bathroom and handwashing • Conversational turn taking • Reflection and planning • Practice healthy eating habits
10:00-10:15	Whole Group Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and seasonal songs with movement • Storytime
10:15-10:30	Small Group Project Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and investigate project theme • Utilize new knowledge and skills for project work
10:30-12:30	Outdoor Play, Project Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Play- imaginative, gross motor, games • Outdoor learning- nature investigation, collecting, sorting, classifying, counting, etc.
12:30-1:15	Bathroom, Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing songs that encourage phonemic awareness • Bathroom and handwashing • Conversational turn taking • Reflection and planning • Practice healthy eating habits
1:15-2:45	Rest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yoga, guided imagery, nap
2:45-4:00	Indoor Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blocks, Dramatic Play, Science, Mathematic Manipulatives, Art, Sensory Play, Music and Movement, Writing, Library
4:00-4:30	Bathroom, Snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bathroom and handwashing • Conversational turn taking

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection and planning • Practice healthy eating habits
4:30-5:30	Departure, Playscape Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacle course with logs, stumps, etc. • Dramatic play, Construction, Sensory play • Child sign-out

J. Description of activities

Arrival

All children must visit the bathroom and wash their hands before being signed in. Parents bring children into the building during the flexible drop off period between 7:30-8:30 AM, help them go to the bathroom and wash their hands, help them dress in their outdoor clothes/gear, and accompany children into the outdoor play space. Parents sign their child in on the sign-in/sign-out sheet and note any changes in contact information for the day.

Playscape Play

Children explore, play, and learn outdoors in the fenced play area. Activities may include climbing and balancing on logs, playing with balls, sledding down hills, sand play, fort building, imaginary play, digging, building with rocks and tree branches, climbing trees, and running. Activities may include a mix of child-directed and teacher-directed activities, individual, small group, and large group play, as well as active and quiet play.

Zoo Walkabout

During expeditions throughout the zoo, children will have the opportunity to observe zoo animals and habitats, interact with zoo staff, and investigate new environmental concepts. Children may also engage in nature play on zoo grounds, create animal enrichment, or help to care for animals.

Bathroom

During designated bathroom times, children visit the bathroom as a class. All children are encouraged to try to use the bathroom (“toilet try”), and all children are required to wash hands. Children may request to use the bathroom at any time during the day, and LSZS staff will honor these requests.

Breakfast

After washing their hands, children eat the breakfast provided indoors or outside. Children learn and practice mealtime manners in a calm, friendly setting while eating a healthy, hearty meal which meets USDA guidelines for nutrition.

Whole Group Meeting

During this adult directed time, children participate in songs, finger plays, and rhymes, and listen to a story. Children may play instruments, dance, or do stretches, a Lake Superior Zoo educator may visit the classroom with an animal, or a special guest may visit.

Small Group Project Work

During this time, children engage in activities planned by LSZS teaching staff to meet the children's interests and developmental needs. Lessons align with the Minnesota's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) and are designed using the Project Planning Journal from "Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years" by Judy Harris Helm and Lilian Katz.

Outdoor Play

Children explore, play, and learn outdoors in the fenced play area and/or on a walking field trip in or near Lake Superior Zoo grounds. Activities may include climbing and balancing on logs, playing with balls, sledding down hills, sand play, fort building, imaginary play, digging, building with rocks and tree branches, climbing trees, and running. Activities may include a mix of child-directed and teacher-directed activities, individual, small group, and large group play, as well as active and quiet play.

Lunch

After washing their hands, children eat the lunch provided indoors or outside. Children learn and practice mealtime manners in a calm, friendly setting while eating a healthy, hearty meal which meets USDA guidelines for nutrition.

Rest

Children are required to take at least 30 minutes of rest time. At LSZS, children do not have to close their eyes or sleep if they are not tired or choose not to, however children must rest their bodies quietly. Many children who don't nap at home will nap in a nature-based program because they play so hard all morning. For those who do sleep, we provide a maximum rest time of approximately 1.5 hours, however children may not sleep that long on a given day and the afternoon's activities may begin earlier than noted on the sample schedule if all the children are awake. Parents are required to send a pillow and blanket for their child for nap time and to take these home to wash weekly. Children may also bring a stuffed toy for comfort during nap time. The blanket, pillow, and stuffed toy may be left at preschool.

Indoor Play

Children can choose from the many possible activities offered in the preschool classroom's interest areas including dramatic play activities that vary by the season and by theme, building blocks, art activities, or sensory activities such as the water table. Other possible activities include literacy activities such as listening to a story or playing with stuffed animals, writing activities, math and manipulative games and activities, or adult-directed activities such as art projects. At the end of free play time, children clean-up and prepare for afternoon snack.

Snack

After washing their hands, children eat the snack provided indoors or outside. Children learn and practice mealtime manners in a calm, friendly setting while eating a healthy, hearty meal which meets USDA guidelines for nutrition.

Departure

Families can pick up their child any time between 4:30-5:30 with all children picked up no later than 5:30 PM. Pick-up typically occurs in our fenced play area or indoors in the case of very cold weather. Parents must sign their child out on the sign-in/sign-out sheet held by the program staff whether indoors or out.

Varied Equipment and Materials

Activities will also require the use of varied equipment and materials both indoors and out. Teachers will change the teaching materials in the classroom every three to four weeks to provide children with a variety of age-appropriate toys, books, dramatic play elements, and other equipment to engage with during indoor play time. Indoor and outdoor activities may include the following equipment and materials:

Using a magnifying glass	Using snowshoes	Playing instruments or dancing to recorded music	Stirring mud with a spoon or stick
Catching insects with a net	Counting natural objects	Pretend cooking with utensils and measuring cups	Using sticks to create letters on the ground
Creating art projects with a variety of natural materials	Using building blocks made of a variety of materials	Using dramatic play materials such as dress up clothes	Using water and other ingredients to make "soup" or potions
Using crayons, markers, pens, and pencils to draw and write	Reading books and listening to stories read or told aloud	Playing in the sand/water table	Using manipulatives such as puzzles or matching games

K. Yearly Schedule

LSZS School-year Session is open from the Tuesday following Labor Day to the second Thursday of June. LSZS Summer Session is open from the third Monday of June to the last Friday of August. Families receive the yearly calendar with enrollment materials. Any days closed for holidays, staff development, or staff work days are considered to be part of the scheduled billing and are included in tuition fees.

L. Statement that the program plan must be available for parents on request.

The Child Care Program Plan is available on the Lake Superior Zoo School website. Families may also request a copy from LSZS staff.