

4AM/JK
October 1, 2013

Hello parents,

We made it through our first two weeks of school! Thank you for taking the time to attend our parent meeting and accompany your child through the first days of school. We understand your time is valuable, but with your efforts, you have helped your child adapt to the third floor classroom and have taken the first steps of building a relationship with us. We ask for your continuing support throughout the next weeks as your child may still be processing all the changes occurring at this time.

Think back to those lazy days of summer for your child- there were no schedules to follow, moms and dads meeting all their needs, making wild rumpuses with siblings, all in the comforts of home. Getting back into the groove of school can be jarring. Many are still getting to know us as the trusted adults. Getting use to the routines and procedures is an adjustment. Understanding our expectations from previous teachers' expectations is an adjustment. Becoming one of a group again is an adjustment. Meeting new faces and personalities is an adjustment. Having the adult not by their side at all times is an adjustment. We ask a lot of them especially during these first few weeks of school; it is not surprising if they can't quite keep it together when they get home. They know home is the safest place. They know you will love them unconditionally... no matter what. Therefore, they may be acting out more. Sleeping schedules may not be as regulated. Toileting may backslide. Even eating habits may alter. These are all common reactions to this transition back to school. With your understanding and reassurances, they will hurdle these behaviors, and we will continue to support them in the classroom as well.

One of the great things we see in a class with kids who already have school experience, whether from Park West or from another school, is that they can delve into their past school experiences and bring in loads of ideas on the first days of school. They know what to do if they want to make a picture for home. They have a sense for making a plan with the blocks. They have all brought something to the class making the classroom louder, faster, and busier! Throughout the room, we hear a lot of initiating play with peers or with teachers and lots of suggestions of what to play with peers. One of these ideas really took on a life of it's own and we've been running with the idea ever since.

Last week, a few JK kids pretended to be doctors and gave some babies and animals checkups. We have heard from a number of kids their recent visits to the doctor, so the following day we brought out our doctor bags and the room went wild! Almost everyone wanted a turn to be a doctor, so of course we created our first sign-up lists. Naturally, the kids all wanted to be the doctors with only a few agreeing to be patients, so the teachers (and some assisting parents in the morning class) played the role of patient. At group time, we talked about

turning our playhouse area into a doctor's office. Both classes helped us generate ideas for what we would need. Here are a few items from their lists: from the morning class- x-ray, doctor rooms, casts for both legs, arms and babies, and treats for after the doctor visit like brownies, ice cream with sprinkles, and lollipops; from the afternoon class- a fish tank, medical instructions, a machine to look at a baby, "someone to tell when it's your turn to be the patient", and toys/stickers to take home.

This week, we moved around our dramatic play area to incorporate a waiting room, a reception area with a computer, doctor examination rooms, and sick beds for those patients that will have to stay the night (our recovery room). We've added robes for the sick, coats for the doctors, a computer for the receptionist, and magazines for the waiting room. We've brought in a light table for the x-ray machine with real x-rays to examine, and we will introduce some charts for the doctor to fill out about each patient.

We are thrilled so many of the kids have participated somehow in either playing doctor or helping us come up with ideas for what we need. Visiting the doctor is a situation they have all experienced (most likely begrudgingly), and the play we are seeing in the classroom helps them make sense of it. It can relieve the anxiety they may feel at a real doctor visit. It may demystify those strange-looking tools/instruments. Since many of them are choosing to be the doctor, they are taking on the perspective they so rarely get to experience- they get to be the one to give the shot! When you are talking with your child about school, ask them about the doctor's office, if they like to be the doctor or the patient? And how come? We introduced a couple of other roles as well, a receptionist who gets to sit at a computer, and a recovery area for patients and nurses. Kids have been very engaged in many of the roles and conversations at home might help them brainstorm possible play scenarios. For example, you can help them think about all the responsibilities a receptionist at the doctor's office has. Or imagine the many reasons people go to see a doctor, etc...

We intentionally created a system with multiple roles to help foster the discovery that there are plenty of potential playmates in the group. Because we are asking people to sign up for turns to be the patient, doctor, receptionist, and for the recovery room kids are engaging with others who are outside of their usual playmates. The one-on-one nature of the doctor's office has fostered communication and a lovely exchange of ideas between peers who are just getting to know one another. We have seen so many excited interactions between kids who hadn't yet played together this year and many new friendships budding.

(If you haven't emailed your child's cubby picture, please email us a photo when you have the chance. Keep working on your child's family questionnaire page if you haven't turned it in yet. We are gladly accepting more pages for our family book.)

See you soon!
ali and Chris