Success of ‘Little School’ childcare prompts expansion at Allendale Columbia

By: Kevin Oklobdzija  November 12, 2021

Allendale Columbia is building additional Little School classroom space to meet demand (provided rendering).

The Little School, a year-round childcare program for children 18 months to 3 years old at Allendale Columbia, is expanding to accommodate additional students beginning in January.

Education at the Little School is based on a Reggio Emilia-inspired, student-driven approach to learning, with children encouraged to follow their curiosities to investigate, explore and experiment in the world around them. The program combines curriculum and guided projects to foster a passion for learning.

The Little School opened in September 2020 and soon reached full capacity, so an additional 2,000 square feet of learning space is being built to meet demand. The new space will be home to two classrooms, one for students 18 months to 3 years and the other for students 3 to 4.
"We were thrilled that the community has eagerly embraced our Little School," Shannon Baudo, Allendale Columbia School Head of School, said in a news release. "Our program fills a large void in the community — there is a real need for an educational childcare program for toddlers, and with our Reggio Emilia approach, our classroom expansion will continue to inspire our youngest students while also providing an option for families wanting full-day childcare year-round from teachers who have master’s in education."

The philosophy behind a Reggio Emilia classroom is to make the environment welcoming and aesthetically pleasing with inspiration drawn from the community, students’ cultures and nature. The room is filled with natural, colorful and useful materials, from musical instruments to items such as pinecones found by students on campus.

The school’s 33-acre campus also provides an outdoor play area and exploration space.

"None of this would have been possible without the head of our Lower School, Michelle Feiss, who is also the director of The Little School," Baudo said. "Her dedication and passion helped bring our year-round childcare program to life."

The Little School operates year-round except for winter break, spring break, Fourth of July week and the week before Labor Day. Classrooms feature keypad entry, cameras and a small 5:1 student-to-teacher ratio. Communication is a priority so parents are updated on daily progress through an app.

For more details or to apply, visit the Little School website.

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