

## **WELCOME TO THE RED BALLOON**

Welcome to the Red Balloon, an Early Childhood Learning Center. We provide a twelve month program that caters to the needs of the working & student families in the Morningside Heights community.

This booklet is intended to serve as a guide and reference for parents and caregivers at the Red Balloon. It includes information on our curriculum and how we function as a community. We hope that it will serve as a valuable resource for you as your child progresses through the school.

### **Our Mission**

The Red Balloon seeks to create a community of children, parents, teachers, and administrators that can provide a safe, creative, and nurturing environment where very young children can learn by making their own choices and exploring through hands-on activities.

### **Educational Philosophy of the Red Balloon**

We believe that children learn best when they have caring adults to guide, respect, and provide challenges for them as individuals and as important members of a group.

We also recognize that children are unique and learn at different rates and in different styles. Our teachers are experienced educators who have developed their own creative and unique teaching styles and methods to respond to each individual child's needs.

The School focuses on nurturing emotional, social, physical, cognitive, and language skills in the children. We aim to develop their

- Problem-solving skills
- Risk-taking skills (accepting mistakes with the understanding that making mistakes is an integral part of learning)
- Pro-social skills (taking turns, using words, cooperative play, discipline, and self direction)
- Independence and self esteem
- Capacity to respect and care for others
- Listening skills and language development
- Pre-math skills and pre-reading readiness

We encourage parent involvement in school activities and believe that parental support in early childhood education has long-lasting positive effects on children's academic performance, self esteem, emotional development, and general well-being.

### **The Curriculum**

The Red Balloon School provides a well-rounded, child-centered curriculum that offers a variety of challenges and experiences for children to explore, including educational games, artwork, story time, drama, music and movement, and a variety of activities that celebrate diversity and promote cultural awareness.

### **Daily Class Structure**

Our teachers create the daily structure for each classroom and plan activities to enable the children make choices in their activities. This in turn enables them to become independent learners. During the course of the day, children have choice time, circle time, teacher-facilitated play, group activities, small-group play, meal times, and outside or gym play.

Teachers work on the children's developmental skills by providing small-group activities: educational games to expand listening skills or language development, pre-math and science games, and pre-reading readiness and writing activities, as well as artwork, music, and movement.

### **The Classroom Environment**

The environment suits the natural movements and developmental needs of the children. Each classroom is made up of several different learning centers, which reflect our curriculum goals. These areas offer specific learning materials accessible to all of the children throughout the day. Teachers use the different classroom areas to initiate and organize group activities. Children may also move freely about the classroom as they chose to interact with one another and/or the materials.

The classroom learning centers enable children to develop important emotional and social skills. In these centers, children may work individually or in small groups. As children plan what they would like to do and carry out their own plans, they learn how to be responsible for their own actions. The centers also foster independence by inviting children to direct their own play, which helps them learn ways to problem solve and play cooperatively with each other. As the teachers learn each child's personality they can help the children develop their conflict resolution skills. Children are also less likely to have conflicts when they are investigating their own interests and constructing knowledge in ways that are meaningful to them.

The learning centers enable children to strengthen important physical and cognitive skills. For example, the limited amount of space in the centers makes the children aware of how many children can work in each area. They learn important pre-math and cognitive skills just by counting how many children are in an area and how many spaces are available. In the art center children are free to create projects individually or to join in a project that is initiated by teachers. Children work with materials to experience and create their own individual artwork and constructions. Art projects also often focus on current curriculum themes.

Designing the classroom is an ongoing process by which the teachers support the children's development and encourage them to try new experiences. As themes change throughout the year so do the materials offered in the centers. As the children progress, teachers offer more difficult materials for them to work with, providing a well-balanced and challenging curriculum.

### **School Governance**

The Red Balloon is governed by a community-elected parent board. The board sets policy for the school. The Director is responsible for the daily administration of the school. The Head Teachers are responsible for the smooth functioning of their classrooms. Details on how the Red Balloon's governing structure works are available in the Red Balloon bylaws.

### **Communication and Participation**

We believe that communication between children, teachers, parents, and school administrators is essential to the educational development of children, and that it enhances relationships that make the Red Balloon a successful community.

Parent-Teacher communication happens informally in the classroom and during bi-annual Parent-Teacher conferences. Teachers also post daily sheets to inform parents of each day's activities. School information is posted on centrally located bulletin boards. Letters to the parents, announcements, reminders about meetings and get-togethers, and newsletters are also distributed. The school director is on site and available for consultation during the school day.

We have an open door policy and encourage our parents to participate in their child's education. Parents are welcome in the classroom at any time.

### **Discipline**

Keeping children physically safe and helping them understand safe behavior are important to us. We encourage discipline by providing a balanced schedule of quiet and active, developmentally-appropriate activities. We believe in talking to the children about the consequences of their actions, and--whenever possible--offering acceptable ways of behaving before a problem occurs, or brainstorming with them about possible solutions to a problem. We will often use such alternatives rather than giving a child time-out, but we are also able to recognize when children need time to pull themselves together and have a space to themselves.

We are particularly aware of the difficulty some children have with transitions – such as shifts in activities or arrivals and departures – and are prepared to respond by giving extra attention to their needs and behavior. It is important that we set reasonable and realistic expectations based on normal age appropriate expectations. Also it is important to model appropriate behaviors. We offer as much help and advise as possible to our parents in addressing discipline concerns.

### **Hours and Classrooms**

Our doors open at 8:00 a.m. and close at 6:00 p.m. Children can come as late as 9:30 and get picked up from 4:00 on. Breakfast is served from 9:00-9:30. We also provide a hot lunch for the children as well as an afternoon snack.

Along with a five-day program we also have a very limited two-day and a three-day program, all are full-day. The children range in age from 2 years old to 5 years old. We

have three classrooms for different age groups. Children are at the following age ranges when they enter these classrooms:

- **Yellow Room** ages 2.0 to 2.6 (up to 11 children)
- **Blue Room** ages of 2.10 to 3.6 (up to 16 children)
- **Orange Room** ages of 3.10 and older (up to 20 children)

Each room has three staff members including a State Certified Head Teacher.

The children are given time at the end of the day to intermingle with the other children as well as become acquainted and comfortable with all of the staff.

### **Enrollment Contract**

All families are required to execute an enrollment contract prior to enrolling at the Red Balloon.

### **School Hours of Operation**

The School is open on school days from 8:00 a.m. till 6:00 p.m. In order to establish a consistent and secure learning environment, we ask that children be dropped off and picked up only during the hours noted below. Later arrivals or earlier departures are disruptive to classroom activities and to the children's peace of mind.

Children's arrival time: 8:00 - 9:30 a.m.

Children's pick up time: 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

### **Meal Times**

Children are offered breakfast at 9:00 every morning and sit down together at common tables. They eat lunch together at about noon time and are offered an afternoon snack. Breakfast, lunch, and snacks are prepared and served by the School. Details are in the section on Food.

### **Lateness policy**

Children are expected to arrive at the Red Balloon by 9:30. The only exceptions are for medical appointments and school visits. The teacher should be notified the day before if you need to drop your child off late.

You are expected to pick up your child no later than 6:00 pm in the evening. The school imposes a fine of \$1 per minute for late pick up to compensate teachers for their additional time. It is extremely important that you pick your child up on time. Most of the staff members travel long distances to the school and have their own family responsibilities.

The lateness policy for the Red Balloon is as follows:

- After 9:30 you are considered "late." If you are late three times (morning or evening) in a semester you will be suspended from the school for one day.
- If you are late another 3 times in the same semester, you will be suspended from the school for 2 days.

- If you are late another three times in the same semester, the Parent Board will consider the termination of your contract.

Each parent will be required to sign a lateness acknowledgement for each incident of lateness when dropping off or picking up your child after the stated time period.

### **Emergency and pickup authorization**

Parents may authorize a relative or caretaker to pick up a child only according to the following guidelines:

#### **Regular pick up:**

Parents must sign a parental consent form authorizing that specific individual to pick up the child on a regular basis. The name, address, and relationship of the individual are required. Pick-up people must be over 12 years old.

#### **Occasional pick up:**

Parents must provide written consent for a child to be picked up by anyone who is not established as a regular pick up person, or a phone call regardless of the relationship that person has to the child. The person picking up the child must show identification to the teacher in charge or the child will not be released.

#### **Emergency pick up:**

Parents must provide the school with the name of someone who lives within ten blocks of the school in case an emergency pickup is needed. In event of an emergency, should the children be required to leave the school building, and the parent or regular caretaker not be able to come to the school, the child will be released with the designated emergency pick up person. Parents should update emergency pickup authorization as needed.

### **Illness Guidelines**

Parents are asked to notify the school by 10:00 a.m. on the morning of a child's absence from school. **We do not administer medication to the children.**

Notification is important to the community, as children often inquire about classmates who are absent and teachers should be able to reassure them or pass along news of the classmate. Illness notification is also important to maintaining communication between parents and teachers, informing other parents about possible health concerns, and supporting teachers' awareness of the children's health overall.

A child is considered too ill to attend school if any of these conditions exist:

- The child has been diagnosed with a contagious disease. The child may not return to the Red Balloon until he/she receives written medical clearance by a physician.
- The child has had a fever within the last 24 hours
- The child displays symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea within the last 24 hours.

If any of these conditions should develop during the school day, the child's parent or guardian will be asked to come in to pick up the child right away.

These guidelines may be revised to adapt to changing conditions. Parents will be notified of any changes in the illness policy.

### **Physical Injuries**

All efforts are made to ensure the physical safety of the children. However, if a physical injury should occur, the following guidelines will be observed:

- Injuries will be reported to the child's parent or caretaker at the end of the day. All injuries will also be recorded in the teacher's log.
- If the injury is not deemed serious (such as a small scratch or cut), the child will be treated by the teachers. Any wound will be cleaned and bandaged, cold compresses will be applied to bumps or bruises, etc.
- If the child is in significant distress, regardless of the nature or seriousness of the injury, the child's guardian will be contacted.
- If the injury requires medical attention, the parent or guardian and the physician identified by the parents will be called at once. If emergency attention is required, the School will call St. Luke's Hospital or the nearest appropriate hospital and will also notify the parent and the child's physician immediately (please see the School Emergency Contact List for details about locations and telephone numbers of local hospitals).

Administration of first-aid treatment and medicine:

If parents exercise any special policies with regards to treatment of injuries, they must inform the School in writing before the child enters the school.

No medicine will be administered by School staff or teachers.

### **Absence from School**

Please inform your child's teacher or the office if your child is absent from school for more than one day.

### **Parent Grievance Policy**

After any questionable incident, the allegedly grieved party has these rights and/or options:

- After normal efforts to settle any differences with personnel ( staff, Director, parents, or others)
- Contact the Parent Board of Directors within 7 calendar days
- The Board has no more than 7 days to contact as indicated the party and arrange an interview.
- The Board then has no more then 7 calendar days to meet with the party, and initiate proceedings, such as inquiry, investigation, background information, etc.
- The Board will have no more than 7 calendar days to determine further action, render a decision, inform the participants, and close the case.

### **Birthdays**

Birthday celebration at the school is encouraged. We do ask for you to keep it simple. **Remember many children have allergies so do not bring any food items that have nut or nut products in them.** We also ask that **no** invitations to a private party be handed out in school unless every child in the class is invited.

### **Change of Clothing**

Please remember to have a complete change of clothing at school. If a child has an accident, please send in a new change the following day. Remember your children grow, and the weather changes. Shorts in June good, shorts in December, not good. Please have your child's name marked in his/her clothing.

### **Changes at Home**

Please inform the office and the class teachers if there has been a change in address, phone number or e-mail. It is also important to let us know if there is an addition or subtraction from your pick up list. If there are any changes at home, as simple as a parent going on a business trip, to changes in a living situation please let us know. Even small changes can affect a child's behavior. When informed we will be better prepared to handle any change in behavior.

### **The Library**

Please enjoy our library. We have many books for children as well as resource books for parents. Books may be borrowed for 1 week. Please return each book in its' proper place. Do not allow your child to climb the shelves, chairs and tables. Please be respectful of the library and its' contents.

### **Toys & Food**

**Please do not allow your child to bring toys or food to school.** We have whatever play equipment they need here. Also remember not to bring food. There are numerous allergies in the school and if a child shares their food with someone with an allergy there could be a life threatening result.

### **School Calendar and Holidays**

A school calendar will be distributed to all parents at the beginning of the year. This calendar will identify holidays and, as much as possible, will list parent meetings and events for the following year.

### **School Closures**

Every effort is made to keep the school open on snowy days. The Red Balloon will close on days that the New York City Public Schools are closed. If the NYC public schools are not in session on a snowy day, the phone tree will be activated to contact parents of the Red Balloon closing.

Should the School have to close because of a weather emergency or other situation, a notice will be broadcast on WCBS (880 AM).

If the School must close at mid-day for any reason, parents will be notified immediately and may ask their emergency pick-up caretakers to pick up children.

### **School trips**

School trips are on a very limited basis. Individual class trips are more numerous and varied according to the capabilities of the children.

School trips have included apple picking, trips to a farm, and trips to the aquarium. Individual classrooms will take shorter excursions to neighborhood sites of interest including the Fairway Supermarket, the local firehouse, local libraries, parks, museums, etc. Parents are asked to volunteer as chaperones and may also simply accompany children on these trips. School trips give parents a chance to get to know one another and allow parents and children to enjoy different environments and to learn from each other and from their own experiences.

### **Supplies**

School supplies are purchased by the school and, sometimes, donated by parents. Supplies are available to all children, with attention given to appropriateness of age and ability to use supplies.

### **Food and Dietary Restrictions**

All attempts are made to serve healthy, fresh, tasty food and snacks to the children. Children enjoy food that is prepared freshly and served by the School. They share breakfast and lunch together at common tables and are offered an afternoon snack. Beverages (water, milk, and watered juice) are also offered at regular intervals during the day.

Parents should notify the school in advance of any dietary restrictions. Sweets and processed foods are kept to a minimum. **WE ARE A NUT AWARE SCHOOL.**

### **Outside Food**

Parents are discouraged from bringing sweets to school, except in the case of birthdays. No food should be brought to school that cannot be shared with the class, and parents are asked to let teachers know in advance if they wish to bring food for the children.

### **Tuition 2011/2012**

2 Year Old (Yellow Room)	\$2,000 month
3 Year Old (Blue Room)	\$1,750 month
4 Year Old (Orange Room)	\$1,750 month
Part time (3 days)	\$1,125 month
Part time (2 days)	\$925 month

Tuition fees are set by the Parent Board and are subject to change.

**Part Time attendance**

Most of the children at the School attend full time. Children who attend 2 or 3 days a week attend on consecutive days. We have found that consecutive attendance best suits the needs of the children and helps them get into the rhythm of school days most easily.

**Schedule of Payments**

Parents or guardians of entering children are required to make the following payments according to the time table below:

Deposit : equivalent to 6-week (1.5 month) tuition (a non-refundable deposit to hold a place for the child at the School)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• half payment due upon signing of enrollment contract</li> <li>• half payment due by September 1</li> </ul>
Participation bond: \$300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• half payment due upon signing of enrollment contract</li> <li>• half payment due on Jan. 1</li> </ul>
Activity fee: \$300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• half payment due Sept. 8</li> <li>• half payment due Feb. 1</li> </ul>
Monthly tuition	by the 5th business day of the month

Parents are responsible for paying their tuition in a timely manner. Your account will be considered "delinquent" if outstanding charges are not paid by the end of the 5th business day of the month.

**Parent-Teacher Conferences**

Each parent must participate in 2 parent-teacher conferences each year at times made available by the teacher. Parents sign up in advance for these conferences and are encouraged to come with questions about their child's unique personality, development, preferences, and needs. Questions about the classroom, activities organized by the teacher, and goals for the class and for individual students are also encouraged.

Teachers will offer a report on the child's behavior and development and will suggest ways that the parent can reinforce or support what is taught or experienced in the classroom. Issues like toilet training, sleep patterns, supportive conflict resolution, pedagogical choices, and the child's enthusiasms, aversions, and capabilities may also be discussed.

**Parent Participation**

Parent participation is at the center of the Red Balloon School and makes the School community possible. Some types of participation are required, some are encouraged, and others (of the parents' own invention) may be added as appropriate.

A deposit of \$300, payable in 2 installments, is required to ensure that families adequately participate in the life of the school. At a minimum, each family is required to

support and participate in Red Balloon Fairs and Bake Sales, Auction and contribute to Red Balloon fundraising activities. If, in the judgment of the Board and Executive Director, the family's participation is not adequate, the deposit may be forfeited.

Parent participation might include time spent baking for food sales, selling at the bake sale, attending school trips, serving on committees, working the Auction, participating in the classroom. Board Members and other parents often enthusiastically give substantially more time to the School.

#### Required Participation

Parents are each asked to serve on one of the School's committees, which vary from year to year (fundraising committee and library committee are examples). Though not required, Parents are also asked to participate general meetings (usually 2-4 per year), in fundraising events (usually 5 per year), and in board elections (usually 1-2 times per year). Parent events are detailed below.

**Craft Fair Food Sale:** Twice yearly, parents are asked to prepare a hot-dish for the School's food sale, and to bring a dish to school in the morning on each of the two days of the sale. Parents choose what dish they will make and sign up in advance. Parents are also asked to volunteer to work at food sale tables. This is an important fundraising activity for the school and full parental participation is required.

**Bake Sale:** Once a year (before Thanksgiving) parents bring home-baked goods to the School Bake Sales. These are located in the residential lobby of 560 Morningside. Parents also volunteer to work at the bake sale tables.

**Auction:** Every parent is required to get at least two items for our "Jazz in June" Auction. They are also asked to sell 4 tickets. We also hope to get families to help us set up and decorate the room.

**Clean Up Week:** Every parent is required to participate in Clean Up Week, which typically takes place during the last week of August. Parents will be asked to participate in cleaning projects in each classroom prior to the beginning of the new school year.

Parents also often visit the school, make presentations to the children, and/or participate in activities with the children.

A summary table of these responsibilities is provided on the following page.

## RED BALLOON FAMILY PARTICIPATION GUIDE

<b>Parent Board</b>		
	9 members	2 year commitment
	Officers	1 year commitment
<b>Committees</b>		
	Social Committee 2 parents from each class	Responsible for school social activities, family parties and holiday events
	Fund Raising Committee 2 Parents from each class	Responsible for fund raising initiatives including bake sale and auction
<b>Class communication coordinators</b>		
	2 parents from each class	Responsible for informing other families about events at Red Balloon and encouraging participation in fund raising activities
<b>Craft Sales: 2 Sales each year in the Fall and in the Spring</b>		
<b>Required: Every family must make 1 dish of food for each day of the 2 day sale</b>		
Volunteers needed:		
	Transport food to site	1-2 hours
	Help set up	1-2 hours
	Work food sale tables	1-2 hour shifts
	Clean Up	1 hour
	Transport back to RB	1-2 hours
<b>Thanksgiving Bake Sale</b>		
<b>Required: Every family must bake 1 pie AND 1 dozen cookies or 1 bread</b>		
Volunteers needed:		
	Staffing the food table	1-2 hour shifts
<b>Auction</b>		
<b>Required: Every family must get 2 items to sell at auction</b>		
<b>Required: Every family must sell 4 tickets to the event</b>		
Volunteers needed:		
	Transport items to Auction	1-2 hours
	Set-up	1-2 hours
	Clean Up	1-2 hours
	Transport back to RB	1-2 hours
	Check out	1-2 hours
<b>Clean-up week: Usually held the last week in August</b>		
<b>Required: Each family must participate in classroom cleaning and/or repair project</b>		

- If all required activities are done, the participation fee will be waived for the following year.
- See the Director if you have any question or concerns.