

# parent handbook

For the Infant-Toddler and Preschool Programs  
2021-2022



est. **1979**



## **Our vision:**

**The Child Educational Center is a caring educational community where:**

- we value children, and help them to thrive and reach their full potential as individuals and as contributing members of society;
- through participation, the members of our community enrich themselves and the community as a whole;
- we commit to sharing our ideals in early care and education throughout the world through outreach.

## **Our mission:**

The CEC's mission is to ignite joy, curiosity, and compassion through innovative children's programs for all.

## **Our values:**

- \* **Integrity:** To maintain integrity of the individual and the institution
- \* **Innovation:** To achieve innovation in our programs
- \* **Diversity:** To embrace diversity of people and ideas
- \* **Excellence:** To demonstrate excellence in our care and programs
- \* **Openness:** To be open about ourselves and our processes
- \* **Nurturing:** To nurture our children, families and staff
- \* **Service:** To provide service to the broader community
- \* **Respect:** To have respect for all

Dear Families,

Please accept our warmest welcome to the Child Educational Center (CEC). We thank you for joining us and look forward to getting to know you as members of the CEC community. We hope you and your family have a rewarding experience with us.

In the pages of this handbook, you will learn about the most important features of the CEC. We ask that you read it carefully and completely. You will find additional information on our website, [www.ceconline.org](http://www.ceconline.org).

In joining the CEC, you become part of a community of staff, parents, children, and extended family and friends, working together to provide an innovative and loving educational environment. In 1979, the CEC arose from a vision of providing the highest quality early care and education services. Then, as now, our overarching goal is to fulfill the promise of childhood.

We pledge to support the children in our care, helping them to fully realize the promise that resides in each of them. Our aim is to work together to discover each child's unique spirit and to respond to him or her in a way that best aids their efforts toward development and growth. We find meeting those objectives enormously gratifying.

As you join with us in this profound process of care and education of your child, we encourage you to consider us your partner. Feel free to come to us with any questions or concerns. We greatly look forward to sharing this journey together. Once again, welcome to the CEC!



## **Table of Contents**

The CEC philosophy.....	6
Preserving the experience of childhood	
A child’s need for love	
Child development theory	
The importance of psychological health	
The role of play in education	
Emergent curriculum: learning how to learn	
Spontaneous and planned curriculum	
Learning outside: the Outdoor Classroom	
Learning to value diversity	
Providing positive guidance	
The power of people in early education.....	9
Ratios of teachers to children	
Our quality standards	
Our children’s programs .....	10
Infant-Toddler Program	
Three-, four-, and five-year olds: Preschool Program	
Kindergarten through 6 <sup>th</sup> grade: School-Age Program	
Enrollment information .....	16
Tuition and fees	
Admissions policy and procedures .....	18
Admissions policy	
Enrolling a child with special needs	
Application process	
Withdrawal from the program	

Operational information ..... 20

Hours of operation

Holidays

Staff professional development and preparation for new school year

Drop-offs, pick-ups and parking

Signing in and out

Site security and access

Arrival time

Prompt pick-ups

Schedule changes

Extra hours

Visiting the CEC

Blankets, lovies, and toys

Keeping the lines of communication open

Communicating concerns

Celebrating our community

Parent participation

Room parents

Parent services

Regulatory agencies

NAEYC accreditation

Health and nutrition..... 24

When your child should stay home

Administering medicine

Nourishing young minds and bodies

No peanuts or peanut butter

Emergency and disaster preparedness

Individual illness and emergencies

Financial status .....	27
Fundraising keeps standards high	
Annual fund	
United Way	
Family Music Festival + Online Auction Benefit	
Governance and leadership .....	28
CEC leadership .....	29
Contact information.....	30
Notice of nondiscriminatory policy.....	31

## **The CEC Philosophy**

Below you will find a brief description of the philosophy underlying our approach to the care and education of children. The rich and comprehensive nature of this research-based philosophy provides a solid foundation for our curriculum and teaching practices. Preserving the experience of childhood

Childhood is a precious time of discovery, development, and growth. Children today face increasing pressures to grow up too fast, depriving them of fundamental early childhood experiences that help them to become successful adults. The CEC is committed to preserving the experience of childhood. In the safe harbor of our indoor and outdoor spaces, children are free to laugh, climb, run, talk, dig, explore, and interact. Through extended and complex play, they come to acquire knowledge and form their own unique identity, and to understand life and their place in it.

Our program is founded on the philosophy that a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth develops from a positive sense of self. We treat children with love and respect, and encourage them to grow, create, and learn at their own unique pace.

The program is child centered. Teachers plan curricula and routines based on the children's interests and abilities and give them the support they need to feel comfortable testing and refining new skills.

### **The role of play in education**

Numerous child development researchers hold that play is one of the primary channels through which young children develop and learn about the world. Through play, children learn how things work and how they can interact with them. Play allows children to explore ideas, practice new skills, solve problems, interact with others, and learn to communicate, work with emotions, explore ideas, and develop creativity.

A common misconception is that play has less value than work or teacher-directed academic learning. But it is through play that children construct and test ideas, and refine critical-thinking skills. In the early childhood years, an excessive focus on tests, workbooks and other achievement-oriented activities may reduce play's productive results. It can also undermine the foundation necessary for later academic achievement.

A primary goal of our program is to encourage constructive play by engaging children in their activities. Teachers facilitate constructive play by offering activities appropriate for a child's developmental level, and keep them engaged by asking questions that stimulate thinking and encourage exploration. CEC teachers have a thorough understanding of the relationship between play and learning.

## **Emergent curriculum: learning how to learn**

Play is central to our method of curriculum development – an approach known as emergent curriculum.

Emergent curriculum recognizes that the potential for curriculum is infinite. Everything holds a basis for knowledge, from the physical environment, to the interests of the children and teachers, and also to their values. Curriculum is not something to be “covered,” but rather something to be explored.

A key component of emergent curriculum is teacher observation. Children’s play reflects their interests and curiosities. When teachers observe how children play and pay attention to their interactions, it becomes possible to plan activities and experiences that have meaning for them. In turn, children become more fully engaged with what they are doing. In effect, children learn how to learn.

Teachers plan curriculum utilizing their professional knowledge and experience, child development norms, and the interests and abilities they observe in the children. Curriculum emerges from both predictable and unexpected events occurring in the group, neighborhood, community, and natural world. When teachers and children are unencumbered by prescribed lesson plans and rigid schedules, they become free to take advantage of the wealth of learning opportunities inherent in daily life.

Teachers encourage children to deeply explore experiences that interest them. Babies learn about the world around them through sensory input. They benefit from environments rich in textures, gentle stimulation, and encouragement to explore. Toddlers build vocabulary and knowledge of the natural world as they hunt for and investigate bugs, leaves, and flowers. Three-year olds eagerly recite favorite stories as they turn the pages of beloved books, all the while gaining deeper understanding that letters are symbols that have sounds and combine to represent words. Preschoolers, fascinated by how things work, learn elementary concepts of physics, mass, weight, and volume by creating extensive construction projects in the sandbox.

An exciting and valuable aspect of emergent curriculum is its spontaneity. One year, teachers in the preschool yard noticed that children had a great interest in water and water flow. That led to a yearlong exploration of pipes, plumbing and ways to move water. Children learned about rivers, dams and reservoirs, as well as plumbing and how water moves from one source to another. The “Pipe Project” culminated in the children designing and building a working sprinkler system out of pipes to use in the play yard. The learning gained from this exploratory project was immeasurable.

This approach contrasts with pre-designed curricula in which adults decide what’s important and impose that activity on children, often in a way that limits its broader meaning. With emergent curriculum, the driving force for learning is the natural curiosity and enthusiasm that emerges from the children themselves.

## **Spontaneous and planned curriculum**

While spontaneity figures highly in the development of curriculum, planning is also required. Teachers become skilled at quick decision-making, incorporating what they observe into short- and long-term planning. As they develop curriculum, they are also addressing awareness and learning in six key areas:

1. **physical**, including gross and fine motor skills
2. **social**, including awareness, respect, the ability to share and cooperate
3. **cognitive**, including comprehension, problem solving, intuition, and skill acquisition
4. **emotional**, including identifying feelings and developing self-esteem
5. **communication**, both verbal and nonverbal
6. **the spirit** of each child, which transcends the emotional experience and pertains to wonder, awe, inspiration, and joy

## **Learning outside: the Outdoor Classroom**

An essential part of our program is the integration of outdoor play. The CEC is a pioneer in the practice and promotion of the Outdoor Classroom, an approach to learning in which teachers support and encourage outdoor play in order to enhance children's development. Indoor and outdoor activities are integrated, with each group comprising an indoor and outdoor play area, and children moving freely between the two. This indoor-outdoor flow provides an exceptional learning and growing environment that also adapts well to each child's unique learning style.

Playing outside helps to overcome a range of obstacles facing today's children, which includes a diminished focus on physical activity and the natural world. Outdoor play also supports cognitive growth by allowing children greater freedom of physical movement, a critical component for stimulating brain development.

During outdoor play, each child can pursue activities suited to his or her unique approach to learning. Children are extremely good at creating learning experiences for themselves. Playing outside becomes an even more effective vehicle for learning when teachers support it by responding to questions, providing materials and information, and offering encouragement and guidance.

## **Learning to value diversity**

We believe that an optimal learning environment is one that values differences in people individually and culturally, and that provides curriculum in a anti-biased way. We maintain a steadfast commitment to reflecting diversity in our curriculum materials, activities and actions. We also strive to create a diverse community in our

program. It is our view that a diverse community provides a rich and rewarding experience for our children, families, and staff.

## **The Power of People in Early Education**

The single most significant factor in the development and well-being of children is access to responsive, skilled, and loving adults. CEC staff members are experienced and caring early childhood educators who have solid knowledge in child development theory and practice. The CEC meets the teaching qualification standards of the National Association of the Education of Young Children and exceeds the requirements of our licensing agency, the Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division.

Not only does our staff have academic knowledge, they also hold institutional knowledge. The average tenure of our teachers is six years, with almost a quarter of them working with us for ten years or more. Our Directors have even stronger staying power, with tenure ranging from 10 to over 30 years. This long tenure reflects their dedication to their leadership role, and greatly enhances the program's success.

An essential factor contributing to staff quality and teacher retention is our use of a team approach. Teaching teams function much like a family, with different members playing different roles yet all roles being an essential part of the whole. While Lead Teachers and Master Lead Teachers provide a leadership role in decision-making, we welcome and expect the observations and ideas of all teachers.

### **Our quality standards**

Since 1989, the CEC's Infant-Toddler, and Preschool Programs have been accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. (NAEYC).

### **NAEYC accreditation**

For more than 30 years, NAEYC has offered voluntary accreditation in order to strengthen the development and implementation of best practices in early care programs for children, families, and staff.

The CEC has been continuously accredited by NAEYC since 1991 (when NAEYC began their accreditation process) and is committed to creating and maintaining high quality in our philosophy and practices.

Accreditation means that the CEC is in voluntary compliance with the Academy's list of criteria for high-quality early childhood programs. These criteria include sufficient numbers of adults with training in childhood development, age-appropriate activities and expectations, ongoing child assessments, regular staff communication, communication with parents, and other elements the Academy deems essential in order to deliver quality care.

## Our Children's Programs

The CEC provides a nurturing, research-based early care and education programs for children aged two months to five years in our Infant-Toddler and Preschool Programs in La Canada and for children 3 years to 5 years old at our Preschool Program on the Caltech campus. We also offer enriching before- and after-school programs and summer camps for school-aged children enrolled in kindergarten to sixth grade (our School-Age Program operates at seven sites throughout La Canada and Pasadena). For details about both our School-Age Programs, please visit [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org).

Enrollment takes place year-round, including summer. Placement in a caregiving group is guided by a number of factors, including chronological age, developmental maturation, and family needs. Children remain with their group throughout the program year, which runs from August to August of the following year. Each group is identified by an animal name. Following are some basic descriptions.

### **Infant-Toddler Program (La Canada)**

Our program for infants and toddlers focuses on four areas:

- Building **emotional security, self-esteem and personal awareness**, by encouraging nurturing and close personal contact with teachers, using positive verbal messages, allowing freedom of play, giving children age-appropriate activities and treating children with dignity and respect
- Developing **communication skills**, by talking with children throughout the day (including during routines such as diaper changing), and by asking questions, providing information, telling stories, singing songs, naming objects and describing activities, and by encouraging children to communicate through facial expressions, gestures and language
- Fostering **social development** between children and teachers by providing loving, respectful interactions that help children to establish a sense of trust and well-being, and fostering relationships with peers through teacher-facilitated physical contact, interaction during play and activities in small groups
- Cultivating **gross and fine motor skills**, by providing age-appropriate physical challenges, such as opportunities for grasping and manipulating objects, climbing, using push toys, and exploring the outdoor environment

### ***Two months to two years: infants (Unicorns and Pandas) and young toddlers (Zebras and Appies)***

The CEC is renowned for its infant program, which welcomes infants starting at two months of age. Some parents may wonder how such small children can benefit from our care. The infant program focuses on the most basic elements of survival: eating,

eliminating, communicating, moving around, and being nurtured. It is through these activities that children learn about themselves and the world around them.

One of the most critical areas of learning for infants is developing relationships — with their bodies, with adults, with each other, and with their environments. Of utmost importance is the ability to create trusting relationships with adults. Infants need to feel confident that adults will care for them and provide for their needs.

To develop these trusting relationships, we use a primary caregiving approach. All teachers interact with all the children in the room, but one or two teachers have primary responsibility for each child (generally, caregiving groups are divided into teams, with each child being paired with one or two teachers on their team). These same teachers feed the child, change diapers, help with naps, etc. Infants learn to depend on the same teachers for comfort, support, and encouragement. Parents depend on them to stay informed about their child's well-being and development.

At the heart of strong relationships is loving and responsive communication. Teachers continually communicate with infants to explain what they are doing and give the infants time to understand and respond. Simple routines such as changing diapers or feeding become crucial learning opportunities when paired with communication that builds a secure relationship.

For their part, infants also communicate, at first mostly through crying. Infants cry to communicate about fear, hunger, fatigue, discomfort, and other emotions. Teachers quickly learn to distinguish the meaning of different cries and respond accordingly. Babies may also use other cues to signal their needs, such as arm motions, facial expressions and body postures.

### **Infants and toddlers on the move**

According to the education theorist Jean Piaget, infants and toddlers are in the sensory/motor stage of cognitive development. They learn primarily through movement and the five senses. They must experience their environment fully and repeatedly in order to make sense of the world and learn from it. Children use their hands and mouth to explore their world, learning about attributes such as taste, texture, and temperature. We provide very young children with materials such as sand, water, mud, and paint to encourage sensory development.

Physical exploration is also crucial to children's understanding of the world and the development of motor skills. Older infants and toddlers learn about their environment by moving through it. Concepts of up and down, in and out, fast and slow are developed by actually being up or down, in or out, etc. Infants and toddlers physically manipulate objects in their environment in order to puzzle out how things fit together and how they work. Children spend a lot of time outdoors at the CEC — crawling, running, climbing, and exploring — all wonderful and natural ways to encourage vigorous physical activity. In addition, physical activity develops muscles, motor skills, and overall coordination.

Significant development occurs in gross motor abilities during the first two years of life. Children will move naturally from their back to their tummies, to crawling, and then to walking and running. In each new stage, children progress from being tentative to achieving mastery. Children need much time and many opportunities in order to gain competency. This is one of the reasons we do not use devices that restrain or prop children into upright postures. Children best develop motor skills when they have free movement of their bodies. As children become more mobile, we introduce developmentally appropriate challenges, such as balls, climbing equipment, push toys, wheel toys, etc.

### ***Two to three years: older toddlers (Bunnies and Koalas)***

The most obvious change in older toddlers is the explosion of language, both in understanding and in usage. By age two, most children say a variety of words and throughout the year, move on to simple sentences, questions, prepositions, and true reciprocal conversation. Whether it is during dramatic play, story time, or general play, children are strengthening literacy and communication skills. The best way of supporting children's language development is to give them the time and opportunity to have meaningful conversations with adults and other children.

### **Becoming independent**

Children at this age develop much more refined self-help skills in the areas of dressing, eating, problem-solving, and toileting. To master these skills, children need to repeat these activities over time. For many children, the process of becoming toilet independent begins during this year. We take a relaxed and child-centered approach to supporting children in achieving toilet independence. We find that an interest in participating with peers and physical maturity, combined with positive, patient, loving reinforcement by parents and teachers, are sufficient motivators for most children. Encouraging children to reach this stage when they're ready offers them the experience of claiming their own success and self-mastery.

While older toddlers are developmentally driven to become more independent, they still crave the security of an adult. They walk a teeter-totter of these emotions, which can create frustration for the child. Two and three-year olds struggle between holding on and letting go and the desire to reach a balance between the two. Children do best when they are given simple choices, clear and reasonable limits, and are allowed to swing from a state of dependence to independence with the assurance that both are okay. We see this struggle clearly in toileting and self-help skills like dressing or eating. Demands of "Me do it" and "Mine" are frequent. Children need consistent, clear, caring adults who recognize the stage that they are in and are patient with the process.

Two and three-year olds also demonstrate this ambivalence in their relationships with peers. One moment, a child seeks a hug from a playmate; in another, she/he may

shove the friend away. Preferences for particular peers often occur during this year, and you will see children seeking out specific children with whom to play.

As the two-year old year progresses, children become capable of more complex learning and sustained activities. They remember things that happen from day to day, they develop patterns of play, and they carry over ideas from one experience to another. The room and yard set-up and design reflects this change. We make sure that materials are accessible over a span of time and that themes and ideas are repeated and carried through.

Gross motor growth is not as pronounced as in the first two years of life, but still undergoes significant changes. A timid half-run becomes a full-out race within a matter of months. A gangly attempt at swinging becomes coordinated and effective. Children become capable of lifting heavier and heavier loads and maneuvering safely with those loads. They also begin to be able to pull themselves up by their arms. They start to climb and jump off objects more often.

At the same time, fine motor control increases significantly. Two- and three-year olds become more capable with buttons, zippers, and hooks, as well as opening latches, cabinets, and containers. This increase in fine motor dexterity dovetails nicely with older toddlers' increased desire for independence.

Our outdoor play space reflects the great range of interests and skills of this age group. During the year, children will play with balls, sand and water toys, paint and easels, swings, tricycles, and wagons. Activities at outdoor tables change frequently, and may include: building toys such as blocks; artistic activities such as clay, play dough, watercolors and glue; literacy activities such as reading books; and fine motor skills involving drawing, writing, cutting, stringing beads, and working puzzles. Exploration of natural elements includes finding bugs, observing plant life, and exploring the physical properties of sand and water.

### **Three-, Four-, and Five-Year Olds: Preschool Programs (La Canada and Caltech Campus)**

Our preschool environment gives children great freedom to choose activities. This doesn't mean, however, that children are in charge or that teachers do not set limits. It is especially important in this kind of environment for teachers to provide children with secure boundaries in which to play. But by allowing them to choose, we encourage children to find activities that are purposeful, interesting, and enjoyable. The result is happy and excited children in a harmonious environment.

Children in this age group are developing increasingly complex thought and have enhanced abilities to investigate situations, hypothesize solutions, and solve problems. We encourage children to explore problem solving in everyday situations as they gather in small and large groups and during social play as they experiment with materials and equipment and explore the natural world of the outdoors.

***Three- to young four-year-olds (Sea Lions and Dolphins at La Canada; Otters at Caltech)***

As they turn three and move toward four, children's view of the world expands. As infants, their knowledge of the world was limited to their immediate family and primary teachers. As their understanding of those around them increases, children begin to deliberately include others in their play.

This starts with parallel play when they are toddlers. By age two and three, they start playing cooperatively with one or two other children. These young three-year olds still operate from a fairly egocentric stage of development. They can put others first and be sympathetic, but typically their own needs still override those of others. This isn't a matter of selfishness, but rather an important developmental stage. As children grow and develop, they begin to emerge from this egocentrism, finding other ways to meet their needs and to delay gratification. Three-year olds and many four-year olds are still very much in this process.

Emotional development is at a critical junction. Children are increasingly independent, but at the same time feel some fear, anxiety, and doubt linked to a heightened sense of responsibility. This is why a child who has been putting her own shoes on for days suddenly collapses on the ground crying, insisting she can't do it. It is just her way of saying, "I'm growing up and it's scary. Help!" Teachers need to find ways for children to make decisions, empowering them to feel they have control over their lives. At the same time, they crave support and nurturing. Three-year-olds need lots of hugs, lap-time, and adult attention.

Teachers (and parents) need to find strategies to avoid power struggles with children without giving complete control to the child. Giving children simple choices, such as which bathroom to use or where to sit at the lunch table, allows them to feel like they have some measure of control.

***Four- to young five-year-olds (Eagles and Flying Squirrels at La Canada; Hawks at Caltech)***

By the time children reach their fourth birthday, they are starting to become less egocentric. Their understanding of others is expanding, if slowly, to include a broader range of people and a growing circle of friends. They move from playing cooperatively with one or two other children to working together with five or more children on the same task. They often plan their activities based on what others are doing and where other children are playing. Their conversations become much more about play, rather than on their needs and wants.

Emotionally, the four-year old child is much more settled than the three-year old. They are more able to deal with emotions such as sadness, disappointment, and frustration. They can identify many more of their feelings, such as frustration or anger, and are therefore better able to navigate these difficult moments. They have a stronger sense of self and more confidence in being independent from their parents.

Saying goodbye to parents at the beginning of the day is generally easier during the four-year old year.

As with the three-year old, the four-year old child is searching for ways to be in control or to feel powerful. They will often engage in power play with their peers, wrestling in the grass like puppies, tackling, and tumbling over one another. It is important to have a variety of nonthreatening ways for children to feel powerful. Giving them adult tasks such as raking leaves or providing heavy objects to manipulate helps them gain a positive sense of accomplishment.

The four-year old understands more about the concepts of reading such as letter/sound relationships and rhyming words. They recognize more print in their environment such as their own name, names of friends, and simple words such as “zoo” or “no.” Children at this age have a growing interest in writing, often creating lists, signs, and letters to support their play. Writing of young four-year olds may not look conventional or ‘readable,’ but it is an important and critical step in the process of becoming a writer and a reader.

### **How does play prepare a child for kindergarten?**

Some parents may worry that play does not adequately prepare their child for the rigors of kindergarten. Our program, while play-based, is intentional, engaging, and challenging. Children take part in numerous activities that test and develop concepts involving math, literacy, and science. Perhaps more importantly, children are developing their potential socially, physically, and cognitively, emotionally giving them the building blocks for advanced learning.

We take the view that it is better to encourage a love for learning than to force a child to memorize facts. Indeed, research shows that when children have abundant experiences that foster exploration and instill a sense of wonder, they develop sophisticated logical thinking skills and a refined ability to problem solve. They also view themselves as competent learners.

Children from the CEC matriculate to a wide range of elementary schools, including those that are private, parochial, progressive, alternative, rigorously academic, charter, and public. The feedback we receive from parents, kindergarten teachers, and principals is that CEC children are confident, curious, and tenacious learners who are well prepared for the next stages in their cognitive and social development.

In the last year of our program, we provide information to parents on how to choose a kindergarten. If you have any questions about kindergarten readiness, please contact one of the Directors.

## **Enrollment Information**

### **How do CEC tuition costs compare to other programs?**

Tuition costs for child care vary widely. While CEC rates lie at the upper level of average costs for private child care in this area, our program provides extremely good value. Research shows the single most significant factor in the development and well-being of children is access to responsive and skilled adults. As a nonprofit organization, we are committed to providing the highest - quality care at the most affordable price. This is an ongoing goal of our Board of Trustees. For more information on how we allocate your tuition dollars, please see the information on CEC revenue and expenses in our Annual Report.

### **Schedule options**

Below is a description of our schedule options; current tuition rates are available online at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org).

#### **Schedule Options**

Full time	Monday to Friday
Three days	Monday, Wednesday, Friday
Two days	Tuesday, Thursday

### **Tuition**

- Current tuition rates are available on the CEC's website, [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org).
- Tuition is billed and due in advance of services rendered and is therefore pre-paid.
- Tuition is charged for all weekdays each month whether or not your child is in attendance. It may be helpful to think of tuition as you might rent on an apartment. It holds a place for your child in the Center. Just as a landlord is unable to rent your apartment while you go on vacation, we are unable to fill your child's space for a brief vacation period while our operating expenses remain constant.
- Exchanging or "banking" unused hours/days cannot be accommodated due to the complexities of ratios and staffing.
- Tuition adjustments for schedule changes will be reflected on the next monthly including extra hours and late pick-up fees.
- Checks should be made payable to the Child Educational Center (CEC), and only mailed or brought to the Oak Grove office at 140 Foothill Blvd, La Canada, 91011.
- Cash payments are not accepted.

- Payments may be made online at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org) either by credit/debit card (with a 2.5% processing fee added) or eCheck (no processing fee).
- An automatic payment option is available through the Caltech Credit Union.
- Tuition is due by the first of each month. A late fee of \$70 is assessed if tuition is not received within 10 days of the first of the month.
- Balances not paid off within 30 days of the initial charge may result in termination of your child's enrollment.
- We charge a \$50 processing fee for returned checks.
- Tuition rates increase at the beginning of each program year to cover operational expenses. These rates are determined each year by the Board of Trustees, as part of the budget process.

### **Tuition assistance**

The CEC maintains a tuition assistance program to help families unable to afford the full amount of tuition. We are seeking ways to develop our tuition assistance program further in order to help more low- and middle-income families. Additional information and application are available on the CEC's website, [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org). JPL and Caltech employees can also seek tuition assistance through their institution's program called the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).

### **Enrollment fee**

Families pay a one-time, non-refundable Enrollment Fee of \$1,000 at the time of enrollment.

### **Registration fee**

A non-refundable registration fee of \$200 is added to your initial enrollment, billed each year in September to cover administrative costs, including supplemental accident insurance, earthquake/disaster preparedness, and other health-related expenses. Accident insurance covers all children attending the CEC and acts as secondary coverage to a family's existing insurance for injuries that may occur while your child is in our care. For instance, it may reimburse out-of-pocket expenses such as seeing an out-of-network specialist.

## **Admissions Policy and Procedures**

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### **Admissions policy**

Enrollment is open to children two months of age through 5 years, without discrimination in regard to sex, race, color, national and ethnic origin, disability, or creed. Infants younger than two months of age may be considered for admission following an interview with a Program Director.

Enrollment priority is typically given to siblings of currently-enrolled children. In addition, Caltech, JPL, and CEC employees are also given priority, along with alumni families. We consider a number of factors when enrolling children, including the date of application, desired start date, and the compatibility of the parents' views with our program's philosophy. The CEC also strives to achieve a balance in each group's composition. A diverse and rich environment of people and cultures facilitates learning. Factors considered in this process include age, developmental level, gender balance, and special needs.

### **Enrolling a child with special needs**

The CEC enrolls children with a range of developmental delays, disabilities, and medical conditions. We consider each child individually and offer enrollment when we are confident that we can meet the child's needs. Factors we consider include suitability with our program philosophy, group size, teacher-child ratio, staff expertise, state licensing requirements and the number of other children with specialized needs within the group.

The CEC has vendor status with a number of Regional Centers in Southern California. These Centers facilitate services for children with special needs and are operated under the auspices of the State Department of Social Services. Local Centers are familiar with the CEC and can advise families on whether our program meets the developmental needs of their child. The CEC also maintains connections with the Special Education departments of local school districts.

Some children with special needs may require therapeutic companions for one-on-one support. While the CEC cannot provide these companions, our Directors and many of our teachers have extensive experience in these situations and can help to ensure that the relationship is an effective one while at the Center.

At a family's request, our staff can provide input for their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan (referring to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act). If you would like more information on our program's inclusion of children with special needs, please contact the Program Director.

**Application process**

Families interested in enrolling their child at the CEC should complete and submit our online application at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org) so that your child may be added to our enrollment wait list. If interested in visiting the CEC to see and learn more, you may schedule a tour at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org).

Most of our admissions occur between March and August for the upcoming program year. However, in the event of midyear vacancies, enrollment is offered to families on the wait list depending upon priority, desired enrollment date, schedule preference, and other factors important in achieving a balance in each group's composition. Each January, families on the wait list receive an email asking them to confirm their enrollment intention by updating their child's online application. Only those families who submit their updated application retain their placement on the wait list based upon the submission date of their initial application.

**Withdrawal from the program**

If needing to withdraw your child from the program, a written notice of cancellation (which includes the last day of requested attendance) must be received by the Director of Admissions with at least 30 Business days' notice in order not to pay any remaining tuition and fees.

If 30 business days' notice of withdrawal is not given, then you will be responsible for an additional month's tuition beyond the last day of requested attendance. If no written notice of withdrawal is given and your child does not attend, then you will be obligated to pay the total annual tuition for the Program Year.

## **Operational Information**

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### **Hours of operation**

The CEC is open from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm.

### **Holidays**

The holiday and closure dates are listed on the CEC's Program Calendar at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org) and is updated throughout the year and through the weekly digital bulletin called *This Week*.

### **Preparation for new program year and staff professional development**

The CEC is closed for service to children five the first week of the new program year in order for teachers and administrative staff prepare for new and returning children to the program. We also typically close for two additional days during the year for professional development activities.

### **Parking**

The central parking lot (adjacent to the CEC office) and the La Canada High School parking lot (east of the CEC at the corner of Foothill and Oak Grove) are available for parent parking during arrival and departure. Please note that there is limited parking in the high school lot in the morning, but after 3:30 pm the entire parking lot is generally available. Parking is also available on Viro Rd., just north of our facility. Please respect those parking spaces designated for CEC staff prior to 3:30 pm and observe the parking times for CEC van spaces.

The CEC shares the central parking lot with Crestview Preparatory School. Goodwill between our programs is dependent on continued cooperation with parking lot guidelines. Please refrain from parking in Crestview parking spaces until after 3:30 pm.

### **Signing in and out**

It is a state licensing requirement for you to sign your child in and out each day. This is our only record of attendance. If someone other than the parent will be doing this, please notify the CEC in writing or by phone. Your child will not be released to someone unfamiliar to us without prior authorization and a photo ID.

### **Site security and access**

Parents and approved visitors may access the Center through designated security gates, as well as through the office. It is imperative that gates are securely closed upon entering or exiting. Do not hold the gate open for anyone except those parents and staff whom you recognize and do not share the access code with others. Access codes are changed periodically, and you will be notified when this occurs.

Immediately notify a staff member of any unusual situation, such as someone loitering on the perimeter of the property, a person trying to gain access who is not a parent or staff member, or anything that causes you concern regarding the security of the site. If you believe there is an immediate and serious security or safety risk, please contact 911 and then the CEC office.

### **Arrival time**

Children may arrive and depart at any time within their enrollment schedule. However, children tend to prefer a predictable schedule. Please discuss your schedule with your child's teacher if you have any questions or concerns.

### **Prompt pick-ups**

Children on a full-day schedule must be picked up by 6:00 pm. Children anticipate the arrival of a parent, and we appreciate your promptness. Keep in mind that staff members have room/yard preparations for the next day, as well as meetings, classes, and families waiting for them immediately after operating hours. The CEC reserves the right to impose a \$20.00 fee for each one to 15 minute increment for late pick up. This charge is per child.

**If you are going to be late, please call the Center and notify us.** If you call after 6:00 pm and get the CEC's voice mail, please call back at 818-354-3419.

### **Schedule changes**

To request a change in schedule, please contact the Director of Administration or a Program Director. Schedule changes need to be requested at least 30 days in advance and will be accommodated as space allows.

### **Extra hours**

If your child is enrolled part-time, extra hours may sometimes be available. To request extra hours, see your child's Lead Teacher. The absence of one child in a room or an open enrollment space does not necessarily guarantee the availability of extra hours. If your child attends extra hours, you must note it on the extra hours sheet next to the sign-in sheet in your child's room. Failure to do so may result in loss of this privilege. Each extra hour is \$15 per hour.

### **Visiting the CEC**

The CEC encourages parents to visit their children whenever they'd like, though it is helpful to notify your Lead Teacher. Parents are also invited to join scheduled outings and other outside activities.

### **Blankets, lovies and toys**

State licensing regulations require each child to have a small blanket (and pillow for preschool children) for rest time. Parents are asked to provide both these items.

Children may also bring a soft, stuffed item, as well transitional items such as “lovies” or pacifiers. We discourage other toys being brought from home, as they are subject to being lost or broken and can sometimes generate excessive conflict among the children. Please note: No toy guns or weapons of any kind are permitted at the CEC.

### **Keeping the lines of communication open**

The CEC is committed to fostering positive relationships among families and between families and staff. To facilitate communication among families, we publish a parent directory and organize regular parent discussion meetings. Communication with staff takes place spontaneously during drop-offs and pick-ups, phone conversations, and parent conferences, meetings, and socials/picnics. A weekly digital bulletin, the *This Week*, contains CEC-wide news and events and is e-mailed to parents. You will find information specific to your child’s room on the bulletin board and white board in your child’s room. You will also find a mailbox for each family. Please check yours daily. If you find these methods are not sufficient, please talk to a director.

### **Communicating concerns**

Open communication is the foundation of a harmonious childcare community. Please communicate your needs and concerns as they arise. You can speak to the Lead Teachers in your child’s room or any of the Directors listed on the contact page of this handbook. They are responsible for the operation of the program and have the training and experience to answer your questions, discuss your child’s development, and work with you to resolve any problems you encounter.

If you have a specific concern, it is often best to schedule a conference with your Lead Teacher. You may request a director to be present or request a conference alone with a director. We are here to meet your needs. Please don't hesitate to make use of our services.

### **Celebrating our community**

A broad circle of people including children, parents, grandparents, relatives, and friends create the special community that is the CEC. As such, when and if health circumstances allow, we hold a series of events to celebrate the spirit of community. These are opportunities to meet other like-minded people, to share ideas, and to have fun. We invite you to participate in as many of them as possible. When public health regulations allow, these celebrations include Grandparents’ and Special Friends’ Day, Fall Pancake Breakfast, Shared Lunch Days, Parent Socials/Picnics, and Preschool Yard Camp Out.

### **Parent participation (on hold for 2021 – 2022 program year)**

Parents are required to volunteer their time to assist the CEC in fund raising, facility improvements, and other activities that support the CEC as a nonprofit organization.

Families whose children attend full-time must volunteer **24 hours per year**; families of children attending part-time must volunteer **16 hours per year**.

Hours are divided into three categories:

- Work Day (8 hours)
- Fund Development (4 hours)
- Miscellaneous (12 hours full time; 4 hours part time)

If you are not able to fulfill your hours according to the above categories, please see the Director of Administration.

Any hours not completed by the end of the program year will be billed at \$25 per hour. A family may also choose to “buy out” of participation at the above rate.

The CEC relies on the active support of parents to hold down costs and make available expertise that would otherwise be too expensive to acquire. Parent participation also builds a sense of community and raises awareness about our program, thus ensuring its continued success.

Throughout the year, you will hear about volunteer opportunities through the digital *This Week*, messages from Room Parents, and special notices. These include activities related to events like the Pancake Breakfast, Online Auction, as well as Work Day opportunities and other needed support. Other parent participation opportunities are also available throughout the year. If you have a particular talent you wish to share with us, please contact a Director.

### **Parent Council / Room parents**

The CEC’s Parent Council is comprised of Room Parents (typically two per group) who volunteer their time and energy to support the CEC staff and to support communication between staff and parents. They can help you learn the ins and outs of the CEC and help you get involved in our community. They are there to support you, as parents, in any way you may require. Please take the time to get to know them and watch for emails communications about Center events.

### **Parent services**

A number of services are available to help parents make the transition to the CEC and to provide guidance in child rearing issues:

- Referrals to pediatricians, family therapists, and special needs counselors
- Lending library of books and articles
- Individual parent meetings/conferences
- The Enrolled Parents’ Information and Resources section at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org)

### **Regulatory agencies**

The Center is licensed by the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing division. This licensing agency has established health and safety standards for early childhood programs and reviews them periodically. As employees of a licensed program, all CEC staff are trained in child abuse identification and designated as Mandated Reporters under California Law.

In addition, the CEC is also governed by the guidelines of the Pasadena Health Department, as well as the Pasadena and LA County Fire Departments.

## **Health and Nutrition**

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### **When your child should stay home**

By State of California Health Department and Community Care Licensing mandate, we must exclude any child from the program who displays symptoms of illness. Symptoms that are cause for exclusion include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, contagious rashes, and ill or unusual behavior. We ask parents to exercise good judgment in keeping children at home when they are ill and to seek medical attention as appropriate. Children may return to the program once they have been symptom-free without the aid of medication for at least 24 hours and exhibit the strength and well-being to thrive in a group environment. For more information, please refer to the CEC's Guidelines for Health and Wellness, which are provided with enrollment materials and also available at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org).

### **Other contagious conditions may also require exclusion**

The CEC maintains a nit-free policy to avoid potential spread of head lice. If a child is found to have head lice, we will ask that a parent pick up the child immediately. Upon return, we check children to make sure they are free of lice and nits. The CEC has a number of resources available to help with parents' concerns regarding head lice. Please make sure to notify us if your child has contracted head lice.

### **Administering medicine**

We prefer that parents administer medication to their children. However, if a child's medication schedule requires medicine to be administered while at the CEC, we will do so following specific guidelines:

- Parents must complete a Medications Consent Form.
- Prescriptions must be in their original packaging, and labeled with your child's name, age, expiration date and dosing instructions.
- Over-the-counter medications can be given according to the dose, schedule, and instructions on the package; otherwise, we need a doctor's note with dosing instructions.

Please note that medications are kept in a locked box in the room and may not be placed in cubbies, lunch boxes, or food/beverage containers.

Under certain conditions, we can accommodate children with anaphylaxis (severe, potentially life-threatening allergies), asthma (chronic lung disease that impairs breathing), seizure disorders (febrile seizures), and sleep/breathing disorders (sleep apnea). Community Care Licensing requires an “Incidental Medical Service (IMS)” plan to be agreed upon and completed by parent, physician, and the appropriate Program Director. Please contact a Program Director for additional information and to request an IMS plan.

The Center reserves the right to decline or terminate enrollment of a child with any of the above conditions if we believe the condition/treatment needs are beyond the scope of our staff’s training or ability to perform in the context of a group setting. In addition, enrollment may be suspended or terminated if communication with the parent does not support our full understanding of treatment need, or if parents fail to provide medication/supplies, instructions, and any required documentation.

For forms relating to the administration of medication, including inhalers, please visit the Enrolled Parents’ Information and Resources page at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org).

### **Nourishing young minds and bodies**

A healthy diet supports optimal mental, emotional, and physical functioning. Nourishing foods include whole grain products, fresh fruits and vegetables, and proteins. The CEC provides two healthy snacks each day: in the morning and in the afternoon. Parents bring their child’s lunch. We encourage parents to prepare healthy lunches.

### **No peanuts or peanut butter**

In order to try to protect the needs of children with a life-threatening allergy to peanuts, the CEC prohibits the presence of peanuts and peanut butter at the Oak-Grove site at 140 Foothill Boulevard. The CEC does not knowingly purchase or serve any food or snacks with peanuts or peanut butter at this location. Regretfully, due to the prevalence of peanut oil in pre-package foods, we cannot guarantee a completely peanut-free environment. We request the cooperation of all parents in following this policy. Specifically, we ask that parents not send peanuts or peanut butter (or foods containing these items) in their child’s breakfast or lunch.

Please notify a director if your child has any food allergy, including an allergy to peanuts.

### **Emergency and disaster preparedness**

The CEC is well prepared for emergencies. Staff members receive extensive instruction on what to do in various emergency situations. Fire and earthquake response drills are conducted on a regular basis to test and refine emergency procedures.

During monthly fire drills, staff members and children evacuate to predetermined areas when the fire alarm bell sounds. After each drill, we review its success and consider any procedures needing improvement.

We also have extensive emergency plans in case of moderate and major earthquakes. We conduct “duck and cover” drills monthly. Directors circulate through the yards and rooms, alerting staff. We use the expression “rabbits in the hole,” when we want children to duck and cover indoors or outdoors. We say “rabbits all together” when we want the children to gather in the center of the yard or the room. Once children come together, staff members wait for instruction to evacuate by designated routes to the softball field behind the CEC. Each staff member is assigned to a response team with specific duties.

Periodically, we conduct extended earthquake drills. During such drills, we practice not only our evacuation procedures, but also initiate our planned response as if there had been an actual large quake. This includes activating our triage, search and rescue, food preparation, communication, childcare and facility teams. Each team initiates their specific response duties, including preparing the evacuation site for long term habitation, preparing a meal, accounting for all children and staff, and checking the buildings for injured persons or damage. During this time, children play in small groups on the field under the supervision of the childcare team. In addition to drills, we have tested our procedures during real earthquakes. We have been pleased with the comprehensiveness of our plans and continue to review and update as necessary. The CEC also takes steps to assure safety in the indoor spaces, such as anchoring heavy objects like refrigerators and fans.

In the event of a moderate to large earthquake, we delay the acceptance of children for at least one hour. During this time, Directors gather information and assess when or if to receive children. If deemed necessary, Directors may elect to close the program for the remainder of the day or longer should the facility sustain damage, local roads become impassable, or for other reasons thought to be prudent, including the likelihood of additional quakes.

If you are en route to the CEC or still at home when an earthquake occurs, please keep the likelihood of delayed acceptance or program closure in mind. If an earthquake occurs during program hours, parents who can get to the CEC should do so as quickly as possible to pick up their child. Staff members will stay with children as long as necessary, but will be eager to look after their own families and homes. The CEC encourages parents to maintain their own supplies of clothing, food, and water in case of emergency. The CEC has established relationships with La Canada High School and benefits from community disaster response resources converging there. This includes the Red Cross, as well as the fire and police departments.

In the event of a fire, earthquake, or other significant situation that impacts the Center’s operation, we contact parents using various methods, including Blackboard

Connect (automated email, phone and text messaging), as well as posts on our Facebook and website.

### **Individual illness and emergencies**

Directors, Lead Teachers, and most Associate Teachers are trained in CPR and first aid and are required to keep their certification current. When a child falls ill or is injured, parents are notified as soon as it is possible. In the event of severe illness or injury, the CEC will first contact emergency services, then contact a parent. In addition, the onsite AED (automated electronic defibrillator) that can be used on an adult or child in the event of a cardiac emergency.

## **Financial Status**

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The CEC is a private, nonprofit educational organization operating under 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. We receive some financial and in-kind support from Caltech and JPL (for the Infant-Toddler and Preschool programs only) but are legally separate from them and responsible for our own financial obligations. More than 90% of our revenue comes from tuition, with the remaining 10% coming from consulting services, fundraising, and other income. Each Spring, the Board of Trustees determines the budget, with parents notified of the CEC's anticipated income, expenses, and tuition rates for the upcoming year. This information is also discussed each September at the Annual Members meeting. All parents are invited and encouraged to attend.

### **Fundraising**

As a private, non-profit school, our main source of funding aside from tuition is fundraising. We have several different fundraising events throughout the year, offering families a variety of ways to help support the school. Fundraising is crucial to the financial health of our organization, and we cannot sustain its high quality of care through tuition alone. A strong fundraising program ensures we can provide all elements of our unique, high-quality care and education programs. All families are required to participate in fundraising throughout the year.

We have several different fundraising events throughout the year, offering families a variety of ways to help support the CEC. Proceeds from our annual fundraising generate critical funds needed for staffing to ensure excellent teacher/child ratios, progressive curriculum offerings for all children, ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers, classroom materials, and much more.

***Here are some ways you can support the CEC:***

### **CEC - Annual Fund**

The Annual Fund is our most significant fundraising initiative of the year. A well-supported Annual Fund fuels every aspect of CEC's operations to provide the highest quality care and education for your child.

### **Annual Event & Online Auction benefit**

All parents are invited to join the Annual Event or Online Auction Committees. Parents receive parent participation hours for their involvement on the Committees.

### **Giving through the United Way**

If you participate in your employer's United Way campaign, you can choose to designate the CEC for your contribution by writing "Child Educational Center" on your donation form.

When Caltech employees donate through the United Way, Caltech generously matches the contribution. United Way campaigns at JPL and Caltech are typically held in the late fall.

### **Matching Gift Program**

Employee matching gift programs are corporate giving programs in which the company matches donations made by employees to eligible nonprofit organizations. It's an easy way to double your contribution to us!

### **Planned Giving**

If you would like to extend your support of the CEC to make a lasting impact, there are several ways to donate. If you would like to learn more, please contact the advancement department.

*\*Donations are deductible to the full extent provided by IRS guidelines. The Child Educational Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (tax ID #95-3403258).*

If you have any questions or would like to get involved, please contact Lauren LeBer, Director of Advancement at [lauren@ceconline.org](mailto:lauren@ceconline.org).

## **Governance and Leadership**

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The CEC is a nonprofit organization governed by its members. Legal membership in the organization is automatically conferred to CEC staff, parents, and members of the Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees is comprised of approximately 20 members, representing a broad community of parents, and other individuals sharing the philosophy and goals of the CEC. The Board is legally responsible for the governance of the organization and helps to carry out the organization's vision and mission. Members are unpaid and serve a three-year term. Each year, the Governance Committee interviews candidates to fill any vacant positions and then makes their recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

Our Annual Members' meeting takes place each September, during which CEC members vote to confirm new board members and to approve any amendments to

the organization's bylaws. As members of the organization, parents have a role of oversight to ensure that the Board of Trustees upholds the vision, mission, and values of the CEC. Indeed, the decisions at the Annual Members' meeting are only legally binding if a minimum quorum of 20% of overall membership is represented. For this reason, families are requested to either attend the meeting or submit their votes by proxy.)

Parents are encouraged to consider board service or to serve on one of the Board committees. Over the years, the CEC has benefited greatly from the knowledge and experience of its board. Board members have included professionals in the areas of human resources, law, fundraising, nonprofits, communications, and financial planning. Their dedication has greatly enhanced business and financial operations of the CEC, strengthening its strategic planning and advising on administrative structures that represent nonprofit best practices. Board members work closely with CEC Directors to build, refine, and strengthen the organization.

## **CEC Leadership**

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- **Tashon McKeithan, Ed.D** is the Executive Director. Tashon provides organizational leadership and strategic planning, as well as broad oversight of all CEC's programs and services.
- **Lisa Cain-Chang** is the Director of Children's Programs, as well as the Infant-Toddler Program. Lisa provides leadership in program philosophy, practices, curriculum, and professional development. She oversees day-to-day operations of the children's programs, as well as coordinates the maintenance and development of the Center's facilities.

Our Program Directors supervise the teaching staff and provide leadership in the ongoing design, expansion, and implementation of program philosophy.

- **Ellen Veselack** is the Director of the Preschool Program in La Canada.
- **Erinn Levin** is the Director of the Preschool Program in Pasadena (on Caltech campus) location.
- **Allegra Inganni** is the Director of the School-Age Program.
- **Helen Ruppel** is the Director of Admissions and Administration. She oversees enrollment for the Infant-Toddler and Preschool Programs as well as the CEC's administrative services.
- **Lauren Le Ber** is the Director of Advancement. She directs the CEC's fundraising and communication efforts.
- **Seta Matossian** is the Controller. She oversees all financial aspects of the CEC, including the organization's annual budget and payroll, and is responsible for the sound management of the financial activities of the CEC in accordance with the established program philosophy.
- **Joanne Meraz** is the Director of Human Resources.

## **Contact Information**

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Our administrative offices and our Infant-Toddler and Preschool Program are located at the Oak Grove site, 140 Foothill Blvd, La Canada 91011.

### **You can reach at us:**

by phone (818) 354-3418

by FAX (818) 393-4243

by e-mail at [cec@ceconline.org](mailto:cec@ceconline.org)

### **Or by email:**

Tashon McKeithan, Executive Director ([tashon.mckeithan@ceconline.org](mailto:tashon.mckeithan@ceconline.org))

Lisa Cain-Chang, Children's Program Director ([lisa.cain@ceconline.org](mailto:lisa.cain@ceconline.org))

Ellen Veselack, Director of Preschool Program, La Canada ([ellen@ceconline.org](mailto:ellen@ceconline.org))

Erinn Levin, Director of Preschool Program, Pasadena ([erinn.levin@ceconline.org](mailto:erinn.levin@ceconline.org))

Allegra Inganni, Director of School Age Program ([allegra@ceconline.org](mailto:allegra@ceconline.org))

Lauren Le Ber, Director of Advancement ([lauren@ceconline.org](mailto:lauren@ceconline.org))

Helen Ruppel, Director of Admissions and Administration ([helen@ceconline.org](mailto:helen@ceconline.org))

Joanne Meraz, Director of Human Resources ([joanne@ceconline.org](mailto:joanne@ceconline.org))

### **Our School-Age Program is Located at Six Sites:**

Oak Grove site (near JPL): 140 Foothill Boulevard, La Canada (818) 354-3418

Westridge School: 324 Madeline Drive, Pasadena (626) 485-0193

St. Bede School: 4525 Crown Avenue, La Canada (818) 949-4378

#### **La Canada Elementary Schools:**

Paradise Canyon: 471 Knight Way (818) 952-3751

La Canada: 4540 Encinas Drive (818) 790-5473

Palm Crest: 5025 Palm Drive (818) 790-2347

A separate handbook detailing the School-Age Program is available online at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org).

More information about the Child Educational Center can be found on our website at [ceconline.org](http://ceconline.org).

**Notice of nondiscriminatory policy**

The Child Educational Center (CEC) admits children of any race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to children in the program. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, tuition assistance programs, and other CEC-administered programs.