

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOLS



Emerson Nickley, 2, watches for activity in the classroom fish tank. Photos by Claire Regan for the Staten Island Advance



Wearing a bow tie and blazer, 3-year-old Jonathan Lubo is looking sharp on school picture day.



Graduate assistants, from left, Anthony Uccio, Adrienne Stazzone, Alyssa Molino and Stephanie DeFilippi join 4-year-old Ryan Reinhold at the sand box.



Three-year-old Aria Delos-Reyes likes to role-play with a baby doll.

WAGNER COLLEGE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

A ‘magical’ place for preschoolers

Claire M. Regan For the Staten Island Advance

Running a successful preschool is hard work. But the rewards are immeasurable. Just ask Carolyn Taverner, director of the Wagner College Early Childhood Center on Grymes Hill. “You really can’t have a bad day here,” says Taverner. “It’s unconditional love every day. You don’t have to be anything other than yourself; the children are just happy to see you.”

SEE WAGNER, A15



Teacher Krista Bonanno works with James Madigan, 3.



The Wagner College Early Childhood Center is located on two floors of Campus Hall, at the back of the Grymes Hill campus.



Four-year-old Ryan Reinhold displays the model he made with interlocking blocks.



Carolyn Taverner, director of the Wagner College Early Childhood Center, also teaches at the college.



Four-year-old Juliette Jasmin is happy to be a student at the Wagner College Early Childhood Center.



“Letter people” help preschoolers learn the alphabet. Photos by Claire Regan for the Staten Island Advance

WAGNER

FROM A13

“Happy” is the operative word at this preschool, located on two floors of a classroom building at the back of the Wagner campus with an enrollment of 72 children between the ages of 27 months and 5 years.

Half-day and full-day programs are available.

The curriculum is play-based. Children are guided through play so they learn along the way, Taverner explains.

“You take advantage of what they do naturally, and it makes them love school.”

On a recent Tuesday morning, the 4-year-olds were gathered on the floor to hear the book, “Glad Monster, Sad Monster,” read aloud, the 3-year-olds were working on a letter recognition project and the 2-year-olds were role playing.

Founded in 1951 as the Wagner College Nursery School, it was originally located at the South Beach Houses.

The school moved to an Oakwood church in the early 1970s before becoming part of the college campus.

The preschool’s connection to Wagner’s education department continues to set it apart from other pre-



“I always wanted to be a teacher,” says Margaret Rucci. Her three children attended the Wagner College Early Childhood Center, where she has taught for the past year.

schools.

CONNECTION TO THE COLLEGE

Undergraduate students majoring in education are frequent observers.

A dozen graduate assistants work all year alongside four master teachers, creating a desirable student-teacher ratio in classes of 12 to 16 children.

“The early childhood center is the reason I came to Wagner,” says Nicole Niemiec, 22, of Sunnyside who works at the preschool three days a week from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. She earned a bachelor’s degree from the College of Staten Island and is pursu-

ing a master’s degree in early childhood special education at Wagner.

Being a graduate assistant “is a great way for me to learn,” Niemiec continues, pointing out benefits beyond the classroom.

Plus, graduate assistants save 80 percent of their tuition costs by working at the preschool, Niemiec adds.

She finds it rewarding to help the children learn how to hold a pencil and print their names.

GRATEFUL GUY

Anthony Uccio, 24, of Westerleigh, stands out among the graduate assistants as an MBA candidate.

But a passion for working with children makes him fit right in.

“I love kids,” he declares. “They’re so curious and they want to learn. This experience is teaching me to be a better dad one day.”

Uccio’s girlfriend of six years, Amanda Ruisi, is a former graduate assistant at the preschool who now teaches at the John LaVelle



Three-year-old Maggie Tessitore gets a helping hand from graduate assistant Anthony Uccio.

Preparatory Charter School in Bloomfield.

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS AND STAFF

Director Taverner has 14 years of experience at Wagner as a faculty member in the education and psychology departments.

She holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Wagner, a master’s degree in developmental psychopathology from Columbia University, and master’s and doctoral degrees in developmental psychology from the CUNY Graduate Center.

She is also a candidate for a third master’s, in education, from Wagner this May.

The preschool has room

to grow and is always ready to accept new students, Taverner says. But staff-wise, there is very little turn-around. “This is a magical place,” she summarizes.

FULL DAY SESSIONS, EXTENDED CARE

Morning sessions run from 9 to 11:45 a.m. and afternoon sessions are from 12:45 to 3:30 p.m. Full-day sessions are from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Tuition for the year ranges from \$2,460 to \$8,200, depending upon length of day and number of days. Extended hours are available for an extra fee, and a four-week summer program is offered from

Wagner College Early Childhood Center

One Campus Road, Grymes Hill (Wagner College campus)

Program Objectives: This program consists of a delicate balance of structured and self directed age appropriate activities. Enrichment experiences are provided for youngsters at their individual levels. Our objective is to assist the young child in acquiring basic competencies and skills while also assuring that the quality of the experience will satisfy, intellectually stimulate and be personally meaningful for each child. Our child-centered curriculum includes readiness activities. Creative music and art, the use of manipulative materials and movement activities are integral parts of the program. Also included in the schedule are mathematics, language arts, science and computer activities.

Director: Carolyn Taverner

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Connections to the Wagner College Early Childhood Center run deep for master teacher Margaret Rucci of Sunnyside, who holds two advanced degrees — one in education from Wagner and another in administration and supervision from Fordham University.

A former graduate assistant at the preschool, Rucci sent her three children there.

“I always wanted to be a teacher,” she says, adding that she lives for the “aha” moments when her young charges grasp new concepts.

“I’m making a difference in their lives. This really makes my heart happy.”


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