

ASSESSMENT PUTS STUDENTS AT THE GODDARD SCHOOL IN ELGIN ABOVE PEERS AT GRADE-SCHOOL LEVEL: RESULTS ATTRIBUTED TO PLAY-BASED CURRICULUM AND CREDENTIALLED STAFF

By Sheryl Nelson • October 7, 2011



Playful Learning: A Recipe for Success!

Now that kids have headed back to school, families have quickly become faced with balancing a healthy portion of organized activities and sports against downtime and free-play. With hectic schedules, carpools, errands and all that life deals out each day, the reality is “play time” often doesn’t fit into the schedule.

This lack of time for free-play is part of a much bigger debate that has ensued over the past 5 years among early childhood educators about how play actually aids in giving young children an edge in academics.

The need to get back to the root of free-time and unstructured fun has long been the basis of the curriculum at The Goddard School, a national childcare franchise system of Goddard Systems, Inc.

Local owner of The Goddard School in Elgin, Sheryl Nelson says, “We put heavy emphasis on the Goddard Systems FLEX Program, which allows children the ability to learn through experimentation and fun, at their own pace. While there is structure in our classrooms, children are given a choice of what activities they wish to do. They think they are playing, and they are, but what is really happening is discovery and experimentation and open-ended learning.”

The Goddard School in Elgin’s approach to learning has been put to the test. The school’s students participated in a computer-based assessment to evaluate the progress of its pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten program. This early literacy and mathematics assessment tool, called Children’s Progress Academic Assessment (CPAA) is given three times a year and the level of difficulty automatically adapts to each child’s performance.

“The results of the recent assessment by the CPAA show that Goddard School students consistently outperform the general population of Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten CPAA users by a significant margin. For instance, 100 percent of students in our Kindergarten program scored higher in expectations in reading when compared to their peers. Our comprehensive play-based curriculum is to thank for these results as the children are given the optimal environment for development and school readiness,” added Nelson.

Beyond its curriculum, Nelson attributes hiring teachers with the best credentials who are “fantastic facilitators to fun” as another major reason why the school’s students excel. Just recently, Nelson added to

the school's roster of talented education professionals when she hired Karen Shell, a Goddard parent and long-time educator in the public school system as education curriculum director. As a parent with a master's degree and years of educational instruction under her belt, as well as a background in gifted education, Shell recognized immediately the benefits that her children received from The Goddard School in Elgin's approach to unstructured play. As the curriculum director, she joins 30 other very talented teachers and administrators at the school, 98 percent that are lead teacher qualified.

"Children are sponges during their younger years and we look for teachers who are inspired to be facilitators to the student's educational experiments, letting them be creative, independent and confident in their skills," said Shell.

She gives the example of their art program, where all students are provided the same materials and given free range of how they use those materials. She says this differs from traditional early childhood education instruction because the children are encouraged to have independent thinking and be creative as opposed to being told to make the same subject of art as their classmates.

Nelson adds, "We are so fortunate to have great leadership in our school and find that when challenged, praised and given the tools to be great teachers, our staff accomplishes remarkable milestones with each of their students. The students then take their independent learning and ability to play and discover and become well adjusted, confident learners for years to come."

Located at 2496 Bushwood Drive in Elgin, Illinois, The Goddard School in Elgin opened its doors in August of 2006 and since has served more than 440 families.

The Goddard School in Elgin is part of Goddard Systems, Inc. Recently named No. 1 Childcare Franchise in the United States by Entrepreneur magazine, for the tenth consecutive year (January 2011) and one of the Top 200 Franchise Systems (in worldwide sales), by Franchise Times, for the fourth consecutive year (October 2010); Goddard Systems, Inc. (GSI) is expanding The Goddard School® network throughout the United States. Headquartered in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, GSI currently licenses 370+ franchised
