

NEW SCHOOL ON THE BLOCK

One of the Nation's Most Successful Nursery School Franchises The Goddard School—takes on Manhattan

By Maria Riley • August, 2011

Next up in our series of new city schools is The Goddard School® on the Upper West Side. This September, Bill Swan and Maria Conti, Manhattan parents who have endured the preschool admissions process, are opening their doors. Swan, along with Goddard Systems CEO Joseph Schumacher, recently chatted with New York Family and shared insights into what sets these schools apart from the rest.

Why Goddard?

Bill Swan: One of the aspects of the Goddard model that attracted us was the involvement of the owner. The Goddard model is that the owners are present on a daily basis. The Education Director is therefore freed up to be in the classroom with the teachers, monitoring, coaching, making sure the model is followed and dealing with special issues with children. Her devotion is specifically and 100% to the educational aspect of the program, and not caught in the administration aspects. That's unique to The Goddard School.

Joseph Schumacher: We want to present a high-quality childcare alternative owned by members of the community.

We think that gives us the benefit of having a locally-owned school operated by a member of the community but with all the advantages of a large corporation.

Curriculum Vitae

Bill Swan: I'm a clinical psychologist, Ph.D. I did work as an Associate Dean, but the most immediate, direct relevant experience is that I ran my own consulting business for over 20 years. I have the entrepreneurial background, business management background and awareness of the educational world.

Maria [Conti] has an MBA and a Masters in Counseling. We each had been moving in separate spheres, but this enterprise is going to bring us together. We both love children; we have our own child, a seven-year-old daughter. We both went through the preschool process ourselves not long ago.

New School In The City

Bill Swan: The impetus for opening up a preschool started with touring our child through a number of them in Manhattan. There is a relentlessness of that process. As we went through the process there are a number of fine, wonderful, strong schools out there, but I did notice that some didn't seem to care that much about the parents' schedule or special circumstances or even bother to have the basic customer service skills that you would think would be present in a business.

Joseph Schumacher: Our quality assurance is the foundation of what we do—health, safety and security. Once we have those standards, there is great opportunity for creativity and flexibility by the individual franchisee. Things like...what we call enrichment programs, which are programs in addition to the standard curriculum—yoga, sign language, second language and fitness, and things of that nature.

Bill Swan: The four and five-year-olds have smart boards, reminiscent of CSI, where they move things around on the glass in front of them. The children can draw on them, touch what they drew, move it to another part of the screen, and combine it with what another child did. It's a fabulous opportunity to engage children in something interesting and have them work together on a project.

School Philosophy

Joseph Schumacher: Our program is based on [Jean] Piaget and its contextual learning, playful learning. Our students are so very different, and we really embrace all the differences. A typical Goddard student is a child that's interested in learning and having fun.

The Goddard teacher has a base education, a love of teaching and real intellectual curiosity. All the lesson plans are teacher-prepared and that provides a lot of flexibility in the event, for instance, you're doing a lesson plan about spiders and there's a thunderstorm outside that catches the kids' attention. You're not locked in to staying with spiders. Kids learn best in what their most interested in at the time.