

GUIDED RECESS

SPOTLIGHT



GUIDED RECESS AT PRAIRIE CREEK

At 11:15pm everyday, the children at Prairie Creek make their way outside to the roughly seven acres of open field, woods, and playground equipment for thirty minutes. Older children help younger children carry large logs through the woods. Large and lively multi-age soccer and football games take over vast amounts of the big field. The monkey bars and swings create a place to build strength, stamina, and conversation. Teachers walk through the woods and the field, available to support students who need help problem solving or identifying the odd natural object. But successful multi-age recess doesn't just happen naturally, students need to learn to be together.

THE BEGINNINGS

The first weeks of school are layered with community and routine building. Recess is no exception. We begin the year reminding children the importance of learning their classmate's names, understanding physical boundaries in games and on the playground, and the safety guidelines. During the course of guided recess, every class has the opportunity to play with every other class. The oldest children take the lead during this time, particularly during play with the youngest children, as they model appropriate game play, attention to gathering signals, and conversation about the game.



"BIG BIRD" STEWARDSHIP

Every fourth and fifth grader has a leadership role in our guided recess as either a Game Leader, a Woods Leader or a Bird Watcher. They train for three days to learn about how to support the play of younger children so that Prairie Creek is a special place for all. Then they teach all of the children in the school, leading them in our most popular recess games and guiding them in their first fort building experiences. The Bird Watchers connect to an individual class, supporting children who hesitate to join play or are struggling to solve conflicts. When guided recess ends, the spirit of support from the elders does not end. Every day you can see older children kneeling down to talk to youngers, checking in with them and including them in their play. They have learned to care.

THE BIG FIELD

High energy sports and cooperative games are a draw to children young and old. Games are often initiated by older children with a welcoming environment to younger children who seek out the fast-paced physical play. Field games encompass the same values of creating a safe, fun and multi-age play environment. Acting as models and facilitators, older children draw on the skills they learned as competitive game coaches. They support game development by using inclusive ways to pick teams, rules explanation, how to solve conflicts, safe multi-age play and how to respond when disagreements occur. Younger children have the opportunity to develop their physical skills while also using a safe common language. Children are encouraged to work through their disagreements and play in the spirit of the game.

THE WOODS

"The Forts" at Prairie Creek have been a constant presence since the birth of the school. For many, play in the woods at Prairie Creek is a life long memory; they have created their own worlds. Students hand down the culture of the woods to each other: how to build a solid structure, exchange currency, and create the perfect pinecone perfume to sell. The bustle of woods play defines the experience of many Prairie Creekers – and through play there they learn to solve problems and work with each other effectively.