



# The Lion Lane School

## Schools Transforming Learning Application

The Lion Lane School  
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The Lion Lane School, an Early Learning Center in Spring Branch ISD, is home to approximately 230 three- and four-year-old students. We offer two programs for our students: PreK3 and PreK4. The population of students at Lion Lane consists of 90% Hispanic, and the remaining 10% African American, White, and Asian. To qualify for the PreK3 program a child must be a second language learner, fall below a certain income, or have one of a variety of military statuses. Students in PreK4 qualify in the same way, however, there is also a tuition-based program. Due to the qualification criteria, 90% of the students are considered Economically Disadvantaged, and 74% are English Learners. We offer a Dual Language program for our Spanish speaking students and a Mainstream/English as a Second Language (ESL) program for students who speak English and languages other than English.

The students that currently attend Lion Lane have spent a significant portion of their childhood, a critical period for language and social skills development, isolated from their peer group due to restrictions from the pandemic. This has led to challenges that most of us have never seen before in schools. Many students we enroll come to school not having met significant developmental milestones such as being potty trained or speaking in one- and two-word sentences. Our leadership team felt the need to take action. The Visioning Document was a critical resource and helped us narrow our focus to ensure that we are educating the whole child and equipping them to be well prepared not only for their academic career, but to become lifelong learners.

We wanted to expose our students to a setting that fostered student voice and choice and allowed students to develop in a safe environment that builds strong adult and peer relationships. With this in mind we began to research and learn about how play in early childhood classrooms develops many of the skills our students were missing academically and socially. We began this journey as a staff and spent a semester studying a book on how play can be purposeful and encourage high levels of learning in young students. This led to conversations that helped teachers move from the idea that they must always lead a lesson either in whole group or with small groups of students at a table to joining students in learning centers and 'playing' with them.

We began to see teachers and paraprofessionals engaging students during center time, asking questions and utilizing imaginative language. One strategy we found beneficial was a serve and return type of conversation with students. With this strategy the teacher is facilitating by asking questions, allowing the student to answer, and the conversation builds and grows. This is a natural and organic way to reinforce concepts taught in class and supports the development of important skills such as the vocabulary and social skills we want for our students.

Taking risks is an important part of play. It allows children to be challenged, problem solve, learn how to work with others, and encourages creative thinking. These are important qualities that build the whole child's ability to be successful in school and the world. At Lion Lane, we are creating environments in and out of the classroom that encourage students to take risks. Free choice centers in our classrooms encourage students to choose and explore. When given the choice on what to play and who to play with students are learning that we value their desires and interests. In our Makerspace lab students work together to solve problems through creativity. They use boxes for blocks to build amazing creations and structures, foil to create sculptures, feathers, and pom poms to create self-portraits, and toilet paper rolls to create a robot. We also encourage risk taking in our Action Based Learning Lab where children can challenge their physical abilities and further develop their gross motor skills by learning to balance, hang and climb in a safe environment.

Literacy has been a strong focus at Lion Lane and our teachers are very skilled in implementing an age-appropriate literacy program. In addition to our focus in developing age-appropriate social skills, we have used the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process to identify areas of academics where we can provide more targeted support for our students. Dual Language teachers have worked to implement a language support strategy called Preview-View-Review (PVR) in math and science, which are taught in English. This strategy uses what students know in their first language to support instruction and vocabulary development in their second language.

Our science and social studies instruction is based on the Reggio Emilia approach, where the curriculum is child-centered and executed through The Project Approach. Students explore and research a variety of topics throughout the year, including, but not limited to water, pumpkins, structures, space, clothing and much more. Teachers utilize their collaborative planning time to design unique, open-ended experiences that encourage students to be active and curious learners, while continuing to align to state and district standards. Two of the projects conclude with a parent presentation, where students get to share and demonstrate their science and/or social studies knowledge, as well as their skills in social awareness, literacy and math in front of their families.

The Visioning Document serves as an important reminder that we are not only preparing students for success in a global society, but also educating the whole child to create lifelong learners and problem solvers. Teacher teams collaborate to look at student data and plan 'just right' instruction to support student learning in all areas. Teachers are thoughtful and intentional in setting up their classroom, providing materials that encourage students to write, draw and create with opportunities to explore different topics and subjects using a variety of materials. Teachers encourage intentional exploration and collaboration when planning learning opportunities. This approach encourages students to build relationships with their teacher and each other. We have the honor of teaching our students that learning can be fun and we get to do that in a setting completely developed for their success. We believe that we have found the right balance to ensure each child at The Lion Lane School goes on to find success, not only at the elementary level, but throughout their educational journey and life.