

# Through a holistic, teacher-enhanced approach to education, preschoolers get started on the right foot at the Egenolf Early Childhood Center

The formative years of a child's development are a critical time during which kids gain exposure to the world around them, forge positive relationships with peers and adults, and build all-important socialization skills. No one understands this better than the expert team at the Egenolf Early Childhood Center in Elizabeth, a landmark institution which has been providing high quality childcare and preschool programs to generations of families in Elizabeth since 1890.

Originally founded 133 years ago as the Elizabeth Day Nursery and eventually relocating to a house donated by the Egenolf family (and ultimately moving to a larger facility where the center has resided since 1973), "our mission has been redefined over the years," said Dr. Lorraine Cooke, executive director of the Egenolf Early Childhood Center. "Over the last several decades, we've provided early childhood education to kids from low- and moderate-income families, and, as participants in the state-funded preschool program mandated by the Supreme Court's Abbott vs. Burke school funding decision, we've offered free preschool since 2000."

Today, "we serve 150 3-year-olds from Elizabeth with a preschool program from 8:15 a.m.-3 p.m. as well as a before-school program from 7:30-8:15 a.m. and an after-care program from 3-5:15 p.m.," she said. "We aim to support working parents by helping to facilitate their employment and enable them to go through their workday with peace of mind."

Across the center's 10 bilingual classrooms, each staffed by a teacher with a bachelor's degree and a preschool-through-third-grade certification as well as a teacher assistant with childhood development credentials, "we use a research-based curriculum called HighScope, an ear-

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Dr. Lorraine Cooke, executive director,  
Egenolf Early Childhood Center



Photo courtesy of the Egenolf Early Childhood Center  
**Children from the Egenolf Early Childhood Center in Elizabeth enjoy a field trip to Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange.**

ly childhood education approach where teachers act on the child's interest(s)," Dr. Cooke said. "Through this child-directed, teacher-enhanced approach that exposes children to math, science, nature, social activities, literacy, numeracy, and more in an age-appropriate way, teachers enhance learning and 'scaffold' it once a student expresses an interest."

According to Dr. Cooke, "kids start out sitting in a morning meeting where they and the teacher talk about the day ahead, then go into 'large group,' where the teacher introduces the concept for the day, which can involve everything from science, food, and animals to nature, the seasons, dinosaurs, the solar system, and much more."

Teachers read books to the kids several times a day, she added, "and the whole day is social because children's positive social development will contribute to their academic and professional success as well as enhance their relationship to the world and their happiness and success in life."

"Preschool is very different from childcare or babysitting," Dr. Cooke said. "Our teachers and assistants understand the stages of child development and are attuned to their students' interests and abilities, which makes ours a highly personalized program." Families are another important component of children's success at the Egenolf Early Childhood Center, "and our team provides critical social supports to families, such as help with food stamps, medical care, home visits, and other services."

As for the results of their quality and holistic approach to early childhood education, "our preschoolers move on from our program with confidence and a love for learning,



**Children from the Egenolf Early Childhood Center in Elizabeth learn about the sense of taste during a classroom activity.**

and their language skills are off the charts," Dr. Cooke said.

As one of just a few early childhood centers in the U.S. to be accredited by the prestigious National Association for the Education of Young Children, "we're a very high-quality facility, our teachers are truly dedicated to their work, and we're extremely proud of the way we help children grow, develop, and gain independence," Dr. Cooke said. "We're an important part of the continuum of education and offer children a joyful start to their academic journey."

#### For More Information

The Egenolf Early Childhood Center is located at 725 Newark Ave. in Elizabeth and can be reached by calling 908-352-7508 or by visiting [www.egenolfecc.org](http://www.egenolfecc.org). Eligibility for enrollment requires residency in Elizabeth; the center also offers a six-week, fee-based summer program that's open to all regardless of residency.

— Susan Bloom