



What makes Lucy School different from other schools?  
A letter to the Lucy School community from Lucy School faculty

This year, more than ever, parents have been turning (and returning) to Lucy School, looking for a "safe haven" from the increasingly test driven instruction in our public schools and even some private schools. We have been told by parents and teachers that the schools are inundating our children with unnecessary assessments, too much desk and worksheet time, tedious hours spent learning isolated facts or math formulas, and minimal time for socializing and outdoor play or exploration time. Valuable "learning time" is spent "teaching to the test."

Neuroscientists know that children learn best by putting experiences together in new ways. They construct knowledge; they don't swallow it. At Lucy School, we use a project-based approach that provides children with ample opportunity for constructive learning. This hands-on approach refers to a set of teaching strategies which enable teachers to guide students through in-depth studies of real world topics. The projects may be student led, inspired by a group experience, correspond with our current drama, or may be individualized. Our unique integration of the arts to support our project work encourages a relationship between teacher and student which embraces the innate curiosity, creativity and rich potential of each child. Children are actively involved in their own learning.

Lucy School uses the Voluntary State Curriculum as a guideline to follow to reach the desired

outcome for each student. The Voluntary State Curriculum is an outline of specific curriculum objectives designated by grade level. Students at Lucy School are instructed based on their ability, so that they are challenged but not frustrated. This is an added advantage for children in mixed-grade classes. The teachers do not have restrictions on how far above grade level they can instruct. Even in FCPS's Gifted & Talented program a teacher cannot instruct any higher than one grade level above the student's current placement. Lucy School truly offers developmentally appropriate instruction, giving our teachers the ability to meet the individual needs of a child.

Our students take an active approach to their learning, with lots of time built into their day for reading, telling and writing stories, problem-solving, working together, using manipulatives, individual expression, and movement. Our Math Moves curriculum is multi-sensory and multi-leveled. In addition, Lucy School faculty have developed a rich environmental curriculum. While most public schools have 10-15 minutes of outside time a day, we are very proud to say that our Primary Students have outside play time each day for at least 30 minutes, with an additional day or two a week of extended outside exploration time. Science/Exploration frequently relates to nature and, when at all possible, is conducted outdoors. Our children learn to value the environment because they have direct experience with it.

To allow for individualized instruction, we not only limit our class size (16 students per class as a maximum), we are also fortunate to have well-qualified teaching assistants in the class during portions of the day that most benefit the student (small group work, language arts, mathematics, etc.). Unlike schools that separate students for "specials," Lucy School teachers are with their students throughout the day during Music and Movement, Art, and Drama. This deliberate teaming provides a wonderful opportunity for classroom teachers to have the flexibility to pull concepts and skills through the whole curriculum, not just specified times of the day. In addition, this enables the arts and classroom teachers to plan and work collaboratively to explore concepts, undertake projects, and foster deeper understanding. Arts-based instruction is designed to engage students, encourage critical thinking, and influence development and learning throughout the curriculum. Our teaching team works together to ensure this engagement.

We do assess children's progress at Lucy School. Our assessments are used to guide instruction, demonstrate competency, determine future goals and areas of enrichment, and to communicate with parents. Teachers use observations, written work, informal assessments, and feedback from other teachers to reteach, refine, and enrich instruction. A portfolio approach is used, and these binder portfolios are shared with parents. In addition, progress is shared with parents through narrative and objective reports and twice-yearly parent conferences.

We are very excited about the addition of a third grade for the 2010-2011 school year – a decision based on recent research indicating

that a high quality, consistent, preschool through third grade experience is critical for successful life-long learning. We also know that some parents (and children!) have expressed concerns about making the transition to a traditional school after third grade. Parents of our graduates have shared that their children were well prepared academically for entrance into area public and private schools, consistently performing above grade level. We feel that children leave Lucy School prepared for this transition, armed with self-assurance, outstanding social skills, a view of themselves as active learners, strong problem solvers and critical thinkers, and a strong sense of self. As one parent shared at our recent primary meeting, "I feel that my daughter's mind has been opened."

#### About Lucy School

Lucy School is located on a 17-acre farm in Middletown, MD. Our preschool is housed in a 19th century barn that has been renovated into a "state of the art" early learning facility. A new "green" building provides an environmental education to all students as well as housing the school's primary programs (K-3).

Lucy School is an art-based school and teacher training center. Years of planning and experience have gone into the creation of this innovative arts-based institution for early childhood development. For more information about our school please visit our [web page](#). Tours are available upon request.

February 19, 2010