

SWHS Preschool:

For over 40 years, SW has offered an authentic learning environment for high schoolers. It is a beloved program, one that generations of families use, due to fond memories of attending or being the ‘teachers’ when in high school. The relationships that form between children and teens are priceless and enduring. My favorite example is a rather squirrely high school boy who connected with a preschooler. His parent letter brought tears to my eyes. His family was loud and chaotic. This preschooler taught him he could interact differently in families and in life. The two families bonded and attended sporting events and childhood concerts. They are still connected, many years later.

We run preschool from September through most of December and then late January through most of May, due to our high school schedule, Tuesdays through Thursdays, from 8:35 or so until 10:55 AM. Teens rotate in planning one week and then on the floor the next. They create DAP activities addressing all areas of development, literacy and math, fine motor, dramatic play, stories, music and movement, crafts, science, etc. There is a second level, interns, who were “teachers” and return to help manage children and procedures. They decorate, assist in planning and on the floor, and coordinate the closing programs. So for the first time in teens’ careers, the focus isn’t on them - it’s on doing what is best for children to prepare them for their next steps. We run a well-rounded program - not just academics - more about social skills, waiting, taking turns, grit and perseverance, communication, etc. The teens learn as much as the children do. Teens learn theory and apply it then reflect on it, while also planning lessons.

Students who want to major in early childhood take the program, but so do those who want to work with children in various capacities - nursing, education, psychology, specialists, etc. And those who want to be better parents or learn to guide children take it as well. Students can choose an internship at a child care center or in a school building during in their senior year as well.

I often have teens who major in early childhood or elementary education. Many like working with young children but leave the door open, since there is such a discrepancy in pay. We used to offer courses to prepare for the CDA, the certification that used to be required. Now, some are moving away from it. It required an extensive portfolio and 480 hours of direct contact with children - and I’m sure the providers here can speak more about it.

I am honored to be part of such an amazing experience for so many young people at South Western. It’s a very special part of the legacy of South Western.