



Distance Learning at Thorne

Distance learning is not what anyone would have planned or hoped for, but in March 2020 the Thorne school along with the rest of the world jumped off a cliff. We were tasked with transforming our developmentally oriented, play based early childhood school into a program that could be delivered online. Our staff persevered with creativity, hard work, and resourcefulness to deliver an experience for children and families that stayed true to our philosophy of play, while engaging and connecting children virtually. By no means did our distance learning program replace the unique in person experience that Thorne provides, but we discovered that even via computer we could connect, respond, learn and play together in wonderful ways.

Our hope and plan is that we will be learning together in person come fall, but the reality is such that we need to be prepared for future waves of COVID-19. If we need to close at any time, we are ready with a robust learning program for all of our classes. Thorne's distance learning program provides a rich asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities for children. Between zoom "meetings", "Friendly Facetime chats", and videos children were able to connect with their teachers and classmates in meaningful ways. Play prompts, crafts, games and academic content were shared through extensive newsletters, special deliveries, and interactive zoom and facetime sessions. Parents were also able to connect through meetings with Jan Linowitz our psycho- educational consultant. These sessions provided opportunities for parents to share concerns and discuss their child's (and their parenting) experiences during this unprecedented time.

Thinking ahead to fall, we will be adding new layers to the online learning experiences. One addition will be the use of Seesaw, a platform for student engagement that will facilitate collaboration and sharing of materials and ideas. Over the summer, staff will be working to augment and fine tune their online curricula so that we are ready for whatever 2020 throws our way. We so hope that we will not have to use this distance learning program, but we are proud to have created something that it is of the same high standard as our in person learning program.

To give new families a picture of what our program is about, I am sharing reflections by parents about their children's experiences this spring. I hope they will be helpful in giving you a sense of of distance learning at Thorne.

The Thorne community is strong and is ready for whatever the future brings.

Parent Reflections

"I am so impressed by the quality and quantity of learning content that is provided by the Thorne preschool during Covid-19. Each week, we receive a newsletter full of play/learning ideas. I particularly appreciate the weekly calendar included in the newsletter because it keeps us organized. In addition, each week brings multiple videos filmed by the teachers. My daughter enjoys seeing the familiar teacher faces in the videos from across the various "grades" at the preschool, including those teachers whom she will have next year.

The preschool teachers actively engage each member of the class during their Zoom meetings, ensuring that every child is welcomed and involved. The teachers are extremely patient as they await responses from the children, just as they are in the classroom. Creative Zoom experiences, such as the dance party and teddy bear picnic, definitely add excitement to the week of a four-year-old! Our family was delighted when the teachers prepared packages of seeds, pots and soil for each classmate and hand-delivered them! This special delivery by our Thorne teacher was an unexpected and (much appreciated!) highlight of the past three months. Thorne always goes above and beyond.

As a parent, I see how much Thorne has done to ensure our children continue to thrive and learn, despite the necessary limitations of quarantine. The school has been communicative at all levels: the teachers, the Thorne psychologist, and the Thorne Director. These communications have been informative and heartfelt during these trying times, true reminders of Thorne's greatest strength: a remarkably engaged and talented staff. "

- Liz Dicoi, preschool parent

"Our remote Thorne experience has been engaging, thoughtful, and balanced. As a parent, I have enjoyed the emails from teachers containing activity and craft ideas, usually centered on a chosen theme. I particularly love the use of Mailchimp for this purpose, as it makes the emails very easy to scroll through quickly or read-in depth. The activity ideas have always been offered as such— completely optional. There is no pressure to join in, give feedback, or complete anything by a certain time; this is much appreciated, as a parent of three. That said, we have chosen to do a lot of what is offered, since both my first grader and my preschooler enjoy them. There is a nice mix of art projects, games, and sensory/science ideas that are thoughtfully chosen to make use of household materials and minimal preparation.

We have all loved the videos created by the teachers. They have been reading engaging stories or learning how to make an art project. I love that Rosalind can watch them independently if she chooses to, and she always remembers the craft directions after! That has really helped me manage my household.

Most importantly, though, is the sense of community that Jodie and Jill have managed to maintain throughout this time at home. They adapted quickly to the new situation, as teachers are apt to do, and have provided video interactions via Zoom. The class is usually split, which allows for the children to see and hear each other better, as well as participate in the activity. Story times have featured engaging stories while also keeping the children involved by asking questions. There have been dance classes, show and tell, and wonderful Thorne traditions like Movie Day, and Teddy Bear Picnic. I was worried that Rosalind would feel sad after seeing her friends, or would

not enjoy looking at small faces on a screen, but she really loves and looks forward to her “Zoom times”. In keeping the community together, Jodie and Jill have offered one-on-one time to chat with the children, and they have been very sweet about responding to the many video messages that Rosalind has created for them when she misses them.

Throughout this time, the regular invaluable emails sent by Jan sustained me. Her words are comforting, empowering, and always, always timely! How does she do that?? Parenting during a pandemic often requires more than we have to give. Each time I was ready to throw in the towel and run for the hills, I found an email from Jan in my inbox, with just the right measure of empathy and advice— enough for me to feel newly ready for the next day.

All in all, Rosalind showed the true marker of a Thorne success this spring: a desire to participate. She looked forward to the activities, Zoom calls and videos, and she feels sad that they are ending now that summer has arrived. This speaks to the connections made at Thorne, the developmentally-appropriate learning and play, and the dedication of the teachers and staff to continue those experiences virtually in a manageable way for families.

I hope we are able to be together in person this fall, but if not, I know I will not need to worry about the quality of programming offered by Thorne.”

- Sarah Liou Preschool Parent

“Thorne has been an amazing experience for our son and our family. While I could comment at length about what the Thorne team delivers in the classroom I want to do a special call out to how well they transitioned to an online environment providing the same thoughtful care and educational experiences for my son.

Each week they delivered comprehensive, theme based plans which stayed true to the play to learn philosophy which we love. Perhaps most importantly, the activities were flexible and contained variants that easily enabled me to use items we already had at home and were able to be short or extended depending on what and when we were able to do them - key for our family environment during COVID.

All that being said what made Thorne's online experience most special were the frequent check ins and method of delivery. Our beloved teachers, Stacey and Erin, sent videos and messages on each normal school day and our Friday circle time with our class has been much looked forward too. They also created online communities to enable our kids to connect to each other and were always available if a 1:1 chat or video exchange was needed. Add to this the contact and resources set up by Amanda and Jan we consider ourselves very lucky.

Every interaction has been so caring and supportive of the unique times we are in. We couldn't be more honored to be a part of the Thorne community.”

- Kate Malgieri Toddler parent