

The Tobin Family of Schools: A Family of Schools at the Heart of the Natick Community



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Nestled into a residential neighborhood only a short distance from Natick Common is a compact campus containing three schools. With playgrounds, parking lots and buildings cleverly interlocked to maximize the space, the network of Tobin Schools has spent the last three decades quietly forming up Natick's newest and most conscientious citizens.

Founded by Mary Beth Claus Tobin in 1985 as the South Natick Children's School, Tobin's programs and locations have expanded and relocated over the years as they sought to meet the needs of a growing community. Thirty-two years later, Natick is home to The Tobin Children's School, offering full-day, full year early childhood programs for infants up through PreK; The Tobin School, school-year programs for preschool, pre-k, junior kindergarten, and kindergarten; and Tobin Afterschool, with school-year and summer programs for children entering kindergarten up through fourth grade.

"From our earliest arrivals at 7:00 until our buildings close at 6:30, there's always something going on," Lori Davis, Program Director of the Tobin School, said "Days at all the schools are filled with activities. The kids learn Spanish, Mandarin, and ASL. We offer yoga for students and physical education, plus we have specialists who come in for art and music. There's even one room filled with all sorts of animals and fish."

The buildings are homey and warm, each brightly-colored classroom featuring eye-catching displays and different zones for different uses. But beyond the home-like atmosphere, every program is accredited, and the teachers are required to keep up their professional development.

Tobin's focus is not just on academics, Davis stresses. "The culture of the school is geared toward supporting the kids' social-emotional development. Those skills are right at the core of who our kids are, not something extra to work in around other activities."

The primary educators of

a child are family, of course, but a school can reinforce the parents' example with a strong social curriculum.

"Open Circle and other curricula are used for elementary students, but they aren't entirely suitable for younger kids," Davis explains, "so we analyzed the best of what was available and then developed our own curriculum."

Tobin's unique curriculum is called the CHEER program: Character and Education for Early Results. The school also utilizes modeling, the Peekapak character education program, and frequent kindness initiatives.

But of greatest importance at Tobin is community service. Over and over, the Tobin Family of Schools finds ways to reach out to the greater Natick community to help their students understand that not only can they make a difference in the world, but that they should.

"We believe children need a solid attachment to their community. Every kid needs to feel included, valued, that they belong, and that they have the power to help others." Davis picks

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up speed as she talks about the children's volunteer efforts. "And they keep doing it even after they age out of our programs. We're always so proud when we see announcements from the schools or the Natick Service Council, and there are the names of our students as the ones who've donated their birthday party gifts or run the diversity program at the high school, or who donate their talents to public events."

The list of Tobin's community service efforts runs for pages. The Tobin Family of Schools are sponsors of The Center for the Arts in Natick (TCAN) and the Natick Community Organic Farm. They participate with the Natick Service Council food, diaper and toiletry drive as well as holiday gift drives. Participating with Change For A Change, the students

collected pennies to save elephants. At the Walk Away Homelessness event, Tobin had a team of walkers. At their annual Family Volunteer Fair, students and their families joined staff in making dog biscuits for the Humane Society and decorating cards for our troops overseas. They also collected Happy Meal toys and tucked them into special snack bags to be distributed at the food pantry, providing other children a special treat when their parents came to pick up their Thanksgiving baskets.

Davis says, "If we instill this sense of service really early, it helps build a stronger community."

Every year there are sixty children in The Tobin School, one hundred in Tobin Afterschool, and up to a hundred twenty in the Tobin Children's School. After twenty-three years, these "little citizens" are becoming "big citizens," and they carry Tobin's spirit of community service out into the larger world.

Parents interested in learning more about the Tobin School are invited to attend the Open House all day on May 9th. They'll be able to see the classrooms and tour the grounds to see how their family will fit into the Tobin community. For more information, visit www.thetobinfamilyofschools.org or call 508-655-5006.