

## **COLLABORATION BETWEEN TWO SCHOOLS PRODUCES INNOVATIVE EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM**

*By*

*Susan Poltarak, Director of Beth El Nursery School*

*Marjorie Zimmerman, Social Worker, The Children's School for Early Development*

*Phyllis Rizzi, Program Coordinator, The Children's School for Early Development*

The Children's School for Early Development in Hawthorne, New York, and Beth El Synagogue Nursery School in New Rochelle, New York, have developed an exciting program for families and toddlers ages 24-36 months.

This parent-child group is a full inclusion, family-centered program for children receiving early intervention and their parents and or caregivers. The staff consists of a special education teacher, a social worker, and two assistant teachers. These individuals provide parent-child educational activities and family support. Children and families from the Beth El community and the Children's School meet two afternoons a week for two hours. The Children's School is part of the Westchester ARC. The goal of the program is to enhance the cognitive and social development of each individual child in a friendly natural environment and to engage the parents in interactive activities with their child.

The following description was submitted by the social worker from the Children's School and the Director of Education from the Beth El Nursery School:

"For the first time ever, a unique early intervention parent/child program for two-year-olds was held at Beth El Synagogue Nursery School in New Rochelle. This unique inclusion program began in September 1998, serves nine children, and runs for two afternoons per week for two-hour sessions from September to June. The program is designed to encourage interaction among children who have a developmental disability (i.e., speech/language disorders, PDD/ autism, muscular dystrophy, sensory integration disorder, behavior problems, developmental delays) and those who do not. The program is staffed by a special education teacher and a clinical social worker employed by The Children's School for Early Development. The Beth El Nursery School provides two staff persons, one with a master's degree in early childhood education and the other with a degree in special education.

When the children arrive at school, they play in the "motor room" where they ride cars and climb on the jungle gym and the slide. They then move into the "classroom" where the children sing songs, play, eat snacks together, while the parents meet with the social worker. The parenting program goals are to strengthen parenting skills through the introduction of play-based educational activities by sharing information about early development and providing support to the parents. Some parents share concerns about their child's disabilities, and discuss the services they are receiving and the programs available for the next step. They also discuss the preparations necessary for attending transition and Committee on Preschool Special Education meetings. Each parent has goals related to increased socialization skills, improved speech and language development, and increased independence. The sessions end with the children playing in the outdoor playground with their teachers while the parents continue to enjoy one another's support and companionship in the classroom. This program is a learning experience for all involved. A tremendous amount of growth occurs as the children progress and become members of a group. Both parents and teachers take pride in the children's accomplishments and their own participation in this special program.