



Where we

Motivate, **I**nspire, **N**urture, **I**magine, and **S**park
creativity in every child.

FAMILY HANDBOOK & PROGRAM POLICIES

MINIS Studio at the ACADEMY

Academy Art Museum • 106 South Street • Easton, MD 21601

Phone Number: 410-822-2787

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Online at: <https://academyartmuseum.org/events/mini-masters/>

License #255007

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Minis Studio, is an Early Enrichment Preschool Program for children ages 2–5. We use a combination of Museum Magic—a Smithsonian museum-based preschool curriculum—and *Creative Connections*—a companion to *Healthy Beginnings*—a developmental resource aligned with Maryland's Early Learning Standards. By combining these inspiring resources, we are able to offer a program that blends exploration of art with basic principles of early learning. In line with the Montessori philosophy, we have a mixed-age classroom that provides an environment for fostering community and encouraging developmental and academic milestones at the individual pace of each learner.

We introduce young children to new ideas through a thematic and inquiry-based approach to learning that emphasizes relationships and the ability to make meaningful connections. It teaches a basic life skill—*how to learn*—and focuses on strategies and techniques that can be applied to almost any encounter with the unknown. The focus is not on acquiring facts or information but rather on the process of learning through inquiry and sensory exploration of objects. It is through this process that children are empowered to make meaning and ideas their own.

Children's literature, objects, and visual images are the key elements of almost every experience. Activities are planned to encourage discussion and increase vocabulary. The curriculum offers a wide range of possibilities and introduces, develops, and ties together individual skills in a meaningful way. Using a multi-sensory, child-centered and inquiry-based approach, we foster creative and independent thinking, self-expression, art appreciation, and a love of learning.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Program Dates: August 31, 2026 – May 28, 2027

Closed on the following holidays*

September 7 (Labor Day)

November 12 & 13 (Waterfowl Festival)

November 25 – 27 (Thanksgiving Break)

December 21–January 1 (Winter Holidays)

January 18 (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

February 15 (Presidents' Day)

TBD (Spring Break)

***Subject to change once Talbot County Public Schools Calendar is available.**

Program Days: 2-day per week option: Tuesday/Thursday

3-day per week option: Monday/Wednesday/Friday

* Space permitting, you may sign up for both options and attend all 5 days.

Program Times: Half-Day Session 8:30 AM (doors open) - 12:00 PM (Pick-up)

Eligibility: We offer rolling admission for children ages 2 to 5. Acceptance into the program after the start of the school year will depend on availability and child readiness. Children do not have to be toilet-trained.

Class Size: Twelve (12) child limit with two (2) teachers. Multi-age classroom setting.

REGISTRATION & INFORMATION

Call or email the MINIS Preschool Director, Lauren Dwyer, at the Academy Art Museum for questions or to set up a visitation day.

Phone: (410) 822-2787

Email: ldwyer@academyartmuseum.org

Online at: academyartmuseum.org/education/mini-masters/

FOR ALL CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we will accept children, and their families, with special needs into our program. If a child has a current IEP or IFSP, families must complete a Request for Accommodation Form and provide a copy of the child's IEP or IFSP. MINIS at the Academy will then determine if reasonable accommodations can be made for the child **and if our program can serve the best interest of the child and / or family with special needs.**

PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM

Children at MINIS learn and explore through circle time, developmentally appropriate learning stations, table time, free choice (puzzles, blocks, drawing/art, books, playdough), story time, snack time, directed individual or small group art projects, guest visitors, museum walks, music, and movement activities. Verbal and artistic expression, problem solving, sharing, compassion, and being able to work in a group are key concepts integrated into our daily interactions and activities with the children.

Mixed-Age Classroom & Developmental Readiness: In addition to offering the benefits of the Museum's unique learning environment, our physical space is self-contained, and all children learn together as a "family." The children's social, developmental and academic growth are enhanced by our multi-age classroom made-up of 2, 3, 4 and 5-year-olds. Our 2-year-olds hear, observe, and learn from the interactions of our older children, and our older children practice empathy, kindness and model behaviors of sharing, talking, and playing together. Our classroom is set up so play areas and materials are accessible to all children thereby encouraging an environment of choice, play and exploration.

Materials & Planning: Activities and art projects are planned so as to offer specific learning opportunities for each child. We individualize the activities based on the child's developmental readiness and interest. For example, during our station time, a 2-year-old may be stringing beads, which helps to develop fine motor control, while a 5-year-old may be stringing beads with the goal of learning about patterning. A 2- or 3-year-old might be feeling textured letters or numbers hidden in a sensory bin, whereas a 4 or 5-year-old may be writing their letters or numbers in sand, shaving cream or on paper. For small group or individualized projects, our goal for a 2 or 3-year-old when making a paper craft might be simply using a glue stick and understanding how to glue pieces of paper on the craft, while our goal for a 4 or 5 year old for the same project would be scissor practice, name-writing, and knowing how to assemble the craft independently or with little guidance.

As we emphasize creativity and choice, we utilize a variety of materials which can be used in open-ended ways as well as plan projects which are based in the process of creating. We use materials and plan projects where children, regardless of developmental readiness, will feel successful. Giving children choices within the framework of the project, knowing what each individual child is capable of or ready for, and allowing exploration and creativity allowing each child to reach their full potential.

Our Art Focus: MINIS is a program of the Academy Art Museum and the children are continually surrounded by rotating art. They regularly visit the Museum's galleries on "museum walks." We talk

about the art we see as it relates to our curriculum themes or as it relates to the process through which the art was created. The children see the diversity of people and things in their world through the artwork they view, and they enjoy discovering how aspects in each piece may relate to their own lives. Asking children what they notice about a piece, having them recreate a certain movement or stance that a subject or piece may be portraying, or engaging in a game of "I spy", are ways in which we encourage children to interact with art. The process by which children create art is equally as important as the product. The children not only enjoy experimenting with art processes, but they also feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in their artwork. In addition to viewing exhibitions and creating art in our classroom, our children often visit Museum artists at work in their studios. These artists will, in turn, visit our classroom to do a project with the children. MINIS seeks to provide an early enrichment experience in the arts, an appreciation for art, and an experience in the varied processes of creating art.

Recess: Recess takes place in our Performing Arts (PA) room, in the classroom or outside. Recess is a regular part of our day and focuses on gross motor development that may include dance, parachute, scarf and ball games, listening games, obstacle courses, singing and open-ended play. Circle time also offers a daily opportunity to sing, move and play instruments. Once per month, the children may observe classical, jazz or opera professionals as they rehearse for the Museum's "Music at Noon" program. The children will also spend time outdoors playing, nature collecting, and enjoying the fresh air in the Museum's outdoor spaces.

Language & Numbers: Language and the alphabet are introduced by emphasizing the phoneme or "sound" that a letter makes. In this approach, the alphabet is not taught in ABC order. Instead, we introduce the easiest sounds first and work up to more complex sounds. This phonemic introduction to letters is an excellent way to ensure reading readiness. We work on number and language concepts using hands-on, sensory-rich activities, such as tracing letters in sand, singing number and alphabet songs, and counting items around the room as the opportunities naturally present themselves. Every task in which a child engages has an intentional learning goal for that child's developmental readiness.

MONTHLY THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

September: All About Me

October:	Fall Changes
November:	Food and Harvest
December:	Wintertime Fun and Holidays
January:	Animals
February:	Community & Friendship
March:	The Weather
April:	Transportation
May:	Ecology

DAILY SCHEDULE*

**This is a child-centred classroom. The schedule in practice is fluid and is determined each day by the children's moods and interests, though each activity is offered, it may happen in different orders and children, though strongly encouraged, may choose whether or not to participate.*

8:30 Arrival & Free Play - children's choice of unstructured, free play throughout the classroom

9:15 Circle Time - theme introduction, directed singing/rhyme, read-aloud, community building

9:30 Arts, Crafts & Centers - individual or small group directed learning opportunities specific to the child's development readiness and developmental milestones and learning objectives

10:30 Snack - independence, fine motor skill practice and choice making are encouraged

11:00 Recess - directed and free choice gross motor; includes outside play time

11:40 Clean-up - students are encouraged to engage in the clean-up process to encourage responsibility and ownership of the classroom environment

11:50 Closing Circle - reflection and casual conversation skills are encouraged

12:00 Dismissal

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Drop-Off: Upon arriving at the classroom, please sign your child in on the sign-in sheet and be certain that one of the teachers is aware that your child has arrived. Doors open at 8:30 am for drop-off. If a child is going to be absent or late, please email OR call the MINIS Preschool Director.

From a child development perspective, consistent and predictable separations are essential for building secure attachment. When caregivers confidently separate and return at the expected time, children learn that they are safe, that adults are trustworthy, and that they can manage short periods of independence. Prolonged or repeated attempts to stay with a child during the school day—even with the best intentions—can unintentionally maintain or heighten a child’s anxiety. By contrast, a brief, warm, and confident drop-off helps children internalize the message: *“You are safe here, I trust your teachers, and I will always come back.”*

Because of this, after the first week of the child’s start date, we ask that parents sign in their child and then drop students off at the classroom door and allow them to transition into the classroom with the support of our staff. We will be right there to guide, comfort and help them feel secure.

While we always strive to give families time to adjust in ways that feel comfortable, extended parent presence inside the classroom can be disruptive to the flow of the program and to other children’s routines. Furthermore, Maryland state regulations require that any adult spending extended periods of time with the class must have completed background clearances. We are only permitted to obtain these clearances for staff members, not parents or guardians.

Pick Up: Only those individuals who are listed on your emergency form will be permitted to pick up your child. ID must be available each time you or someone else picks up your child. Please sign out on the sign-out sheet. Parents are required to pick up their children by 12:00 pm.

Weather and Other Closures: MINIS follows the weather cancellation schedule of Talbot County Public Schools (TCPS) but will open at 10:00am for all weather-related **delays**. Parents, however, may use their discretion when inclement weather is a factor. **While MINIS at the Academy attempts to follow the TCPS calendar, we reserve the right to make independent decisions regarding holiday, vacation, and Museum-related closures.** A calendar with important dates such as holiday, vacation, and Museum-related closures is included in this packet and can also be found on our website. Parents/caregivers will receive written notification of changes or updates to these calendars. Please tune in to WCEI 96.7 FM for local closings and emergency information.

Snack: Please provide a water bottle / sippy cup and snack for your child each day. **There is an area on the emergency form to enter allergy information. Please inform the staff if there is any change to your child’s allergy status. Our allergy policy changes based on the needs of enrolled students. We reserve the right to change the allergy policy at any time to create a safe learning environment for all enrolled children. Parents/Caregivers will be informed in writing about policy changes. If you do not comply, you risk your enrollment status.** Snacks should be prepared to reduce choking risk. Food may be returned, uneaten, if it does not follow developmentally appropriate guidelines. Please ask the Preschool Director for more information if you need it. Research based guidelines for choosing snacks can be made available upon request, though a good rule of thumb is:

- Fat source + protein source + fruit or veggie = sustaining snack

Communication: Every other week, an email newsletter is sent to families including news, pictures of projects, events, or announcements. We feel that open communication serves the best interests of

everyone, including the children. We will set up a parent-teacher conference if we think an issue needs to be addressed. Parents may also request a conference for any reason. Please never hesitate to call or email us.

Family Involvement Opportunities (volunteers): We encourage families to sign up for visit days whereby a family member can share their profession or conduct an activity with the children. Please let us know if you would like to schedule a family sharing day.

We also encourage families to sign up to provide a snack with the class. It can be for a birthday, or other special occasion. Well-balanced treats are encouraged.

Families are encouraged and invited to attend several celebrations per year. We enjoy getting to know the families and spending time with them. Halloween, Winter Holidays, Valentine's Day, Earth Day and Graduation are some of the special celebrations where families are invited to attend and are invited to contribute. We will post sign-up sheets and celebrations are indicated on our newsletters.

Volunteers will never be permitted to be with any child without a teacher present.

Parent/Teacher Conferences: Conferences will be offered twice per year in October and May. These are encouraged but not mandatory. We will discuss the progress of your child and welcome your concerns and input. As always, parents may request a conference for any reason at a mutually convenient time and day. A conference sign-up sheet will be posted prior to the date.

Assessment: Every task in which a child engages has an intentional learning goal for that child's developmental readiness. For example, a 2 or 3-year-old may be learning to string colored beads to develop fine motor skills, while a 4 or 5-year-old may be stringing beads to create a pattern. We use ongoing, informal assessment through observation and conversation to determine the progress of each child. Teachers will also use checklists and rating scales which may be used to relay information during parent-teacher conferences. A helpful resource regarding developmental milestones can be found at: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly.

Clothing: Children will be using some materials that may stain clothing. Please keep this in mind when dressing your child each day for class. We ask that you provide a set of extra, season-appropriate clothing for your child, including underwear and socks, for use in case of accidents. Parents will be sent periodic reminders when extra clothes, diapers, or pull-ups may be needed.

Positive Behavior Guidelines: The healthy social development of each child is paramount in our program. We use a positive behavioral approach with all children. To encourage and support children's healthy, positive social behavior, children are given choices throughout the day. Children may choose from a variety of activities that they enjoy which encourage and support their positive behavior. As a play-based, child-centered program, our children have access to a variety of activities at all times.

Providing choice encourages autonomy which encourages authentic acceptance and purpose. This engagement encourages positive interactions and behaviors naturally.

We recognize and implement behavior support for our children based on their developmental readiness to comprehend a situation and the effects of their actions on other children using a natural consequence approach. MINIS does not practice “discipline.” If a child’s behavior warrants intervention, the teachers will first explain and reiterate to the child(ren) the problem behavior. Desired behavior will be modeled by the teacher and the child will be encouraged to continue to engage. If undesired behavior persists, the teacher will redirect the child to alternate activities. If a child is developmentally ready, we will ask the child to engage in a conversation about behavior expectations and guidelines. When appropriate, apologies will be modeled by the teacher and then the child will be invited to offer an apology, though not forced. An invitation to enter our “calm-down” space independently or with an adult for independent or one-on-one time will be offered when emotions escalate to encourage developmentally appropriate connection and modeling of emotional regulation skills. A child will only be required to be removed from a situation when potential injury to self or other children is imminent. If behavior is a continual disruption to the class and the safety of others, we will call home asking for the child to be picked up.

Pets: We do not have classroom pets and no animals are allowed in the museum.

SAFETY & HEALTH

Forms: Every child is required to have his/her medical and emergency information on file at all times, including our Treatment Consent Authorization. State required medical and emergency forms are to be completed and submitted upon enrollment. (See the website links for these State forms).

Safety: The teachers are trained in CPR and First Aid and have been trained in Emergency Preparedness. A copy of the Academy Art Museum's Emergency Plan is located in the classroom and has a full explanation and diagram of evacuation procedures including our designated "safe place" located at The Armory "Waterfowl" Building across the street. Please see *Minis at the Academy Emergency Response and Reunification Procedures* document for more detailed information. Our classroom contains medical first aid supplies as well as lists of all family and emergency contact information which is kept handy. We conduct Fire Drills once per month and Emergency Evacuation Drills, Emergency Weather Drills and Lock Down Drills twice per school year. Please listen to WCEI 96.7fm for any local emergency information or inclement weather issues. (See our Weather Policy). Our staff, as well as any and all staff who may be present with the children such as substitute teachers or office personnel, are fully background checked and responsible for reporting any suspected child abuse. We keep the classroom door closed, the front desk to the building is manned at all times and the children are supervised at all times. We have a required sign-in and sign-out sheet for caregivers to initial at the classroom entrance. A list of people authorized to pick up a child is required in enrollment documents. It is protocol to check ID at least the first time a new caregiver picks up a student and each time a new teacher is facilitating drop off.

Health: We practice handwashing techniques with the children every day after bathroom time, before snack, upon entering the classroom and after handling art supplies. We ask that parents please adhere to our Sick Policy (noted in this handbook). We also adhere to our food policy whereby nut products may not be allowed in the classroom depending on the needs of our enrolled students. Food must be prepared properly to avoid choking hazards—please ask the Preschool Director for research-based information if you need it.

Sick Policy: Generally speaking, a child should not come to the program if they are showing the following symptoms:

- have a rapidly spreading rash
- have difficulty breathing (this includes extremely stuffy noses and continual coughs)
- persistently crying
- are unusually irritable

Children are not permitted to come to the program if they are showing the following symptoms:

- *Diarrhea:* loose stools which occur more frequently
- *Rash:* when accompanied by fever or behavioral changes must be determined by a primary care provider that the child is not contagious
- *Fever:* temperatures above 101°F and/or showing other symptoms
- *Abdominal pain:* pain that lasts more than two hours, or appears intermittently
- *Vomiting:* within the previous 24 hours, two or more times
- *Skin sores:* on exposed skin or are open
- *Other:* Chills and/or sore throat; Strep Throat (must have been taking an antibiotic for at least 24 hours before returning to school); Bad cold (non-clear discharge from nose and/or bad cough, especially if it has kept the child awake at night); Head lice – until child has been treated

If your child becomes ill at the Museum and we feel your child is too sick to benefit from school or is contagious to other children, you will be called to take your child home.

Medication: While the Preschool Director is trained for Medication Administration, if your child is taking oral medication or needs application of topical medication, you must give it or apply it to your child before he/she comes to school. **If your child needs the medication while at school, you must complete the Medication Administration form.** You must supply it in the original product packaging. Put the medication in a Ziplock baggie and label the bag and medication packaging with your child's name. You must include written instructions for use of all medications including sunscreen, insect repellent, and diaper rash cream.

Screen Time: MINIS does not use electronic devices for children's entertainment during the school day. There is no "screen time" during class time. Rare exceptions may include short videos for learning purposes or special movie days. Movie days will only occur after written permission is obtained.

COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

MINIS provides families with website links for Maryland's family resources as well as physical copies of brochures and handouts which include phone numbers and websites. MINIS updates and identifies available resources by searching local and state websites based on the requests and needs of our families and students. Please contact the Preschool Director if you need further information on resources or need access to a service. The following are some helpful websites.

- www.marylandfamilynetwork.org
- www.earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/families/about-child-care/specialized-child-care-services
- www.earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/why-are-judy-centers-important
- <http://www.talbotcountymd.gov/uploads/File/TFN/FinalVersion11-25-08TALBCORESOURCEDIRECTORY.pdf>