

# CELEBRATING A DECADE OF



By **Brooke Gibson** | Minister to Preschoolers

In the Bible, Jesus shows His great love for children and teaches us that the early childhood years are a prime time to lay a foundation of faith. In Matthew 19:14, He says: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." The Dawson Day School, a weekday ministry of Dawson, partners with Dawson's Preschool Ministry to seize every opportunity of these critical years to fill young hearts and minds with the truth about our great big God and His abundant love and good plans for them.

While the Arendall Building was under construction in 2011, Dawson was also making plans to use the new space for a morning preschool program for Dawson families and for the community. It was a happy day when Kathy Daniel, a teacher and Dawson church member, agreed to become the Director of the new Dawson Day School. Soon after, she began networking with other local preschool directors, creating policies and handbooks, ordering supplies, and recruiting teachers. From the beginning, Kathy was clear that she wanted to create a program that had a family feel and intentionally taught about Jesus. With those goals in mind, she crafted this mission statement:

The Dawson Day School is dedicated to enriching the spiritual, physical, and intellectual development of all children in our care; helping them realize their fullest potential in a warm and loving Christ-centered environment. We are to be found faithful as we share the love of Christ in the Birmingham community.

The Dawson Day School opened its doors for a "soft opening" in January 2013 with 25 students and 6 teachers. In 2023, we celebrated a decade of the Dawson Day School.

Today, the program has:

- **110 students**
- **25 staff members**
- **72% of our students (62 families) are non-Dawson attendees**

The Dawson Day School is open Monday–Thursday, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m., and classes are available for children ages 18-months to 5 years old. The days children attend are determined by their age group. Somewhat unique to the Day School is our Pre-K option, lovingly known as the "Busy Bee Class." This class offers an extra year of preschool learning before beginning Kindergarten.

A typical day of school includes group time teaching, learning centers, crafts, lunch and snacks, chapel time, and playing with friends in the gym and on the playground. Students also enjoy special events throughout the year like theme-related dress up days, Hosanna Parades, Easter Egg Hunts, Thanksgiving Programs, and Year End Celebrations.

Kathy leads a staff of incredible women, most of whom are Dawson members. These teachers love the Lord and desire to faithfully care for, educate, and point children to Jesus.

A current Day School teacher, Annie Ayer, describes her experience like this, "The Day School has been a special part of our family for years. Both of our boys have attended, and I am now blessed to serve as a teacher for two-year-olds. The teachers here truly love the children as their own and enjoy pouring Jesus in to their little hearts!"

Because preschoolers learn through play, the Day School teaching team is creative and intentional as they prepare engaging, hands-on, age-appropriate activities for them to enjoy.



Teachers use this engaging curriculum to prepare the children academically for elementary school by teaching colors, numbers, letters, and basic information about the world through fun learning units such as All About Me, Community Helpers, and Farm Life. But they are also helping the children grow socially by teaching them to be kind, to take turns, and to work together with their peers. Most importantly, the Day School staff partners with parents to guide their children's spiritual development as they teach Bible stories and simple Bible truths like: "God made you. God loves you. Jesus wants to be your friend forever."

While the ultimate goal is to connect preschoolers and their families to Jesus, we pray that our Dawson Day School families feel welcomed to connect with the Dawson Family of Faith as well. We often remind them that they are invited to everything that happens on Dawson's campus. We make it clear that if they already have a church home, we encourage their commitment to that congregation but hope they will think of Dawson as their second church family. And, if they do not have a church home, we invite them to join us on Sunday mornings for worship and Bible study.

We are thankful for the ways that Dawson's Preschool Ministry and the Dawson Day School partner together to strengthen the spiritual development of children and their families. The most obvious way this happens is through Bible teaching. Day School classes follow along with the Preschool Bible curriculum used on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, teaching the same weekly Bible stories and monthly Bible verses. The Day School's weekly chapel time is led by our Preschool Ministry's Worship Leader, Jessica Orso, who uses many of the same praise songs. Additionally, the holiday Family Faith Talks created for Dawson Preschool Ministry families are also given to Day School families for

Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter seasons. Many Day School families attend our DPM Family Nights and KidLife—and several parents as leaders!

Through the years, the school has also served as an introduction to other Dawson ministries, specifically Dawson Ballet and the Dawson Music Academy.

Reflecting on a decade of memories, Kathy is most proud of the times that the Dawson Day School introduced preschoolers and their families to the love of Jesus, helped children get special help when needed, came alongside families to offer help and encouragement during trying times, and celebrated important family events like births, adoptions, and healing.

One Day School mom, Katie Crawford, who has been a DDS mom from the beginning, sums up the ministry of the Dawson Day School best. "For 10 years now, Dawson Day School and its people have been a rich blessing in the lives of our children and in our family. We are members of another church in the area, but we always felt comfortable calling Dawson home, too—because the Day School has been just that.

From safety during Snowmageddon to prayers and support following the critical illness of a child, partnering with Dawson in raising our kids has been a wonderful experience academically, personally, and spiritually. Most of all, the staff and teachers at the Day School love our children, and they love the Lord. Every part of the school points back to Christ and His work, and we all, kids and parents alike, seem to learn so much from this special place. We truly treasure the Dawson Day School and we always will."

The Dawson Day School is a gift to our church and to our community. We look forward to many more decades of sharing God's love and His word with the children and families who are influenced by its ministry.



"All four of our children have attended Dawson Day School, with so many of their core memories coming from within the walls of their preschool classrooms at Dawson. It's been a pivotal part of their early learning years, and our family has been immensely blessed by the wonderful staff and many incredible teachers who have loved our children well and pointed them to Jesus.

This year is our 10th year at the Day School, and we're so grateful to God for leading us to this preschool. He has used it in many ways to nurture our children and enhance their spiritual and educational growth. We are also grateful to Dawson for always inviting their preschool families to church-wide events. Though we attend another church in Homewood, Dawson has always been our second church home and continues to serve us through KidLife, preschool ministry activities, summer camps, and other community outreach efforts."

— Tiffany Adams



**Brooke Gibson** serves as Dawson's Minister to Preschoolers and is passionate about sharing God's love and His word with young children. Brooke's family joined Dawson when she was six months old, and she is thankful for the many milestones Dawson's church family has celebrated with her, including baby dedications, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. She is married to Darrell, and they enjoy traveling and spending time with their adult children and grandson.