

Plainville Citizen Op Ed, February, 2015

The expanded Plainville Community Preschool Program is off to a terrific start. In September, more than 100 four year olds began AM and PM sessions at Wheeler, Toffolon, and Linden elementary schools. The program, which previously only served students with special needs and some typical role models at Linden, now includes close to 80% of the incoming kindergarten class of 2015. Children are attending preschool in the school they will attend for kindergarten next year.

The goal of our preschool program is to provide experiences that will allow the individual child to develop at his or her own pace in a supportive and enriching environment. The learning opportunities are active and provide the children with foundational knowledge and understanding from which future learning can take place. A critical aspect of best practice in early childhood education is the inclusion of all children, including English language learners, advanced learners, and those with developmental disabilities. We implement a high-quality inclusive program that supports the learning of all children. The Plainville Community Preschool Program strives towards developing readiness skills for all children as they prepare for kindergarten and beyond. Throughout all units of study, children are placed in small learning groups in order to provide direct instruction in their academic, social or behavioral skills as outlined in the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards. Student needs are assessed using our district wide preschool evaluation and professional judgment, then placed in the appropriate learning group.

During a recent three-week unit about animals and winter, the program addressed animal hibernation during winter, learning to identify animals, and classifying animals by features, type and size. Using non-fiction text and dramatic play, students continued their learning about winter animals and problem solved on how all the animals could stay warm in the winter. Students retold the story of The Mitten using props, developing communication skills through play. The “Hibernation and Animals in Winter” theme introduced students to different ways that animals survive in the cold. Students made connections to themselves and things they do during the winter months. Over the course of a few days, in dramatic play, the children used “found” materials from nature and recycled items to work together to create a house they may want to live in for the winter. Students were assessed on their approach to creating a structure, capacity to problem solve with peers or seek help, and their use of peer observation to gain new ideas for solving problems.

Our newly expanded preschool program features collaboration with area PreK/daycare providers such as the Plainville YMCA, Great Beginnings, Penny’s Playground and the Plainville Early Learning Center to provide PreK programming and/or daycare when the students are not attending the Plainville Community Preschool Program. Our program was purposely designed to not run on Monday afternoons so that each of our certified preschool teachers in the Plainville Community PreK can serve as a liaison to these local providers. Our teachers regularly consult with each program regarding student concerns. This has led to referrals to our program for screenings. During the 2014-15 school

year, we have begun a “Dine and Discuss” program that will meet twice annually. During these evening sessions, all preschool providers in Plainville meet to share ideas and specific in-service training is provided. Our first session was held on January 13, 2015. Over 50 local preschool providers attended and learned about using visuals to structure a prekindergarten classroom as well as technology for preschoolers.

The Plainville Community Preschool Program is hoping to make upgrades next year if awarded a Smart Start grant that was recently submitted to the State Department of Education. This could add additional slots and fund some facilities improvements, allowing us to attain national accreditation.

For more information about the program, or to inquire about enrolling for the next school year, please contact Cathy Demers at (860) 793-3270 X142.