

Plainville Citizen Op Ed, February, 2016

The expanded Plainville Community Preschool Program is now in its second year. We are serving more than 110 four year olds in AM and PM sessions at Wheeler, Toffolon, and Linden elementary schools, which is approximately 80% of all incoming kindergarten students. Children are attending preschool in the same school they will attend kindergarten in the following 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. Instruction is provided in academic, social, and behavioral skills as outlined in the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards.

As a school district we developed our PreK programs believing that providing our students with a high quality preschool experience would increase students' readiness for kindergarten. To that end, we compared kindergarten entry assessment data from 2013-14 to data from students entering kindergarten

in 2015. We noted the following positive outcomes in our kindergarten students this year:

- **22% increase in students' ability to identify initial sounds in words**
- **13% increase in students' ability to recognize letter names and identify letters**
- **40% increase in students' pre writing skills**

In addition to these academic gains, our kindergarten teachers are reporting that students who attended our preschool are able to learn the routines and expectations of kindergarten much faster. Kindergarten teachers have also noted improved fine motor skills such as pencil grip, writing their name, cutting, and gluing. Since students already knew many of their classmates from PreK, they felt a sense of community in their classrooms right away. They also know their way around the schools and are familiar with teachers and other staff members.

Our expanded preschool program continues to collaborate 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. We have also continued our "Dine and Discuss" program, where preschool providers in Plainville are invited to meet to share ideas and participate in early childhood training. Our most

recent session was held on January 13. Over 40 local preschool providers attended and learned about culturally responsive teaching practices and behavior management strategies.

The Plainville Community Preschool Program was recently awarded a Smart Start grant that will allow us to add a full day Prek classroom at Linden Street School. We will also use grant monies to make facilities improvements that will allow us to attain national preschool accreditation by 2018.

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