

Plainville Citizen Op Ed, March 2017

The expanded Plainville Community Preschool Program is now in its third year. This year, we are serving more than 100 four year olds in full day sessions, Tuesday through Friday at Wheeler, Toffolon, and Linden elementary schools, which is approximately 80% of all incoming Kindergarten students. Children are attending preschool in the school they will attend for kindergarten next year.

As part of this expansion, the preschool team has been working toward accreditation by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (NAEYC). NAEYC accreditation is a rigorous, voluntary process in which early childhood programs demonstrate that they meet the national standards of excellence in the areas of family partnerships, positive relationships with peers and adults, health, a safe physical environment, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and leadership. NAEYC accreditation ensures that programs are safe, well prepared, and intentional about ensuring children's success. Programs that have obtained NAEYC accreditation observe higher levels of children's readiness and success in school and beyond; increased educational attainment rates; and overall healthier lifestyles. The school district expects to have completed this process and obtain NAEYC accreditation by Spring, 2018.

Plainville's preschool program has also partnered with the University of Connecticut's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UConn UCEDD) to provide training and technical assistance in the implementation of the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Young Children. This national, research-based system of social-emotional support ensures teachers create learning environments where children are engaged, they feel good about coming to school, and provides the foundation on which new learning can occur. We have piloted the implementation of this model in all three of our preschool classrooms at Linden Street

School this year and expect to expand the implementation of this model to Toffolon and Wheeler School for the 2017-18 school 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, promote inquiry and discovery, 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 designed to meet the developmentally appropriate cognitive, language, academic, social, emotional, and physical development standards as outlined in the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS).

As a school district, we developed our preschool programs believing that providing our students with a high quality preschool experience would increase students' readiness for Kindergarten. We noted the following positive trends in our children this year:

- 70% of our students entered Kindergarten able to identify initial letter sounds and could name upper and lower case letters
- 80% of all Kindergarteners are at or above grade level in Math

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 many students already knew their classmates from preschool, 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.

Given the success in our current Tuesday through Friday full day model, we now want to expand to a full week, full day model. This will allow us to expand our enriching opportunities for students such as field trips and extension activities. Next year we plan to run our preschool programs at all three elementary schools, Monday through Friday from 8:50-3:00. In order to continue to provide the high quality programs with an expanded schedule, we will charge a reasonable \$100 per month fee. A sliding fee scale will also be available.

For more information about the program, or to inquire about enrolling for the next school year, please contact the main office of your neighborhood school - Linden Street School at 860-793-3270, Toffolon School at 860-793-3280, or Wheeler School at 860-793-3290 - or the Special Education Office at 860-793-3214. The district will begin mailing enrollment documents mid-April.