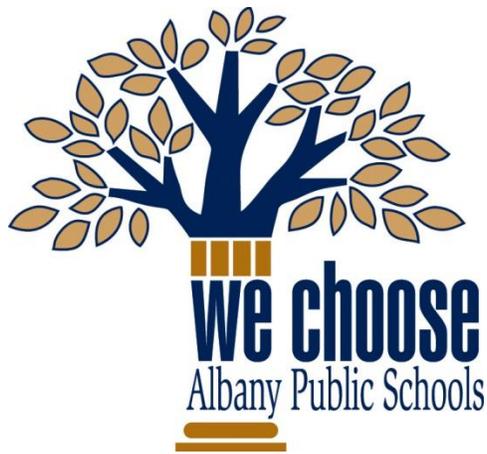


City School District of Albany Prekindergarten Parent Handbook



Mission

The mission of the City School District of Albany Prekindergarten Program is to provide children with a safe, nurturing and child-centered learning environment that supports the development of the whole child.

We are committed to developing independent, confident students, who will be academically prepared and socially responsible citizens, solving problems as lifelong learners in the global community. This is accomplished through an enriched curriculum that builds upon the foundation established at home, moving along a continuum which prepares students for a seamless transition to our Kindergarten programs.

Our Philosophy

Our philosophy is based on our understanding of how children learn best. Upon arrival you will notice that your child's classroom is buzzing with activity. The children will be exploring, conversing and discussing often through play.

Research from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and experience tell us that to be effective with young children, teaching practices need to be "developmentally appropriate". This means that teachers need to think first about the best way children of this age learn and then create an environment and experiences that are in tune with children's characteristics.

Early childhood (3-6 years old) is a time when children learn better through interactive experiences than through just listening to a teacher talk. Children learn an extraordinary amount through play and exploration. Our day is structured, yet flexible in response to children's abilities, which extends itself to opportunities for exploration, learning and purposeful play in a developmentally appropriate way. We believe that play is children's work in early childhood classrooms and that they must be active learners and participants.

Another component of developmentally appropriate practice is to make the program a welcoming place for every child. We gear our classroom environment and activities to our community and families. We are eager to learn as much as we can about each child's family, cultural background, past experience and current circumstances. With this knowledge we work in partnership to create a program that fits the children and families we serve.

Goals of our Curriculum

Our curriculum supports children in becoming enthusiastic learners. This means we encourage children to be active and creative explorers who are interested and confident to try out new ideas and to think about their own interests and thoughts. We do this

through purposeful and intentional play and learning experiences which help children grow in the following areas of development:

- Cognitive: Children will have the opportunity to problem solve and use materials and their imagination. The environment supports asking questions, thinking logically by sorting, classifying, comparing, making patterns and counting.
- Language, Communication and Literacy: Children will have the opportunity and modeling from adults to use words to communicate with others, be listened to and to participate in conversations with others.
- Physical: Children will have the opportunity to increase their large muscle skills by running jumping, throwing and catching and small muscle skills by cutting, drawing, lacing and writing.
- Social/Emotional: Children will have the opportunity and modeling from adults to develop independence, self-confidence and self-control through communication, following rules and routines and developing peer- relationships as part of a group.
- Approaches to Learning: Children will have the opportunity to actively explore materials during their prekindergarten experience. Time in the daily schedule allows children to learn and investigate new things, to choose materials and to experiment with those materials.

The City School District of Albany uses the Creative Curriculum which is aligned to NYS Pre-Kindergarten Foundation for the Common Core. The Creative Curriculum provides a framework for teachers to plan learning experiences that are appropriate and interesting to the children in their classroom.

The activities we plan for children, how we organize the environment, and plan the daily schedule, are designed to support the goals of our curriculum and give your child a strong foundation for future school success.

A Typical Day

- Welcome/Arrival: Children are welcomed and unpack their things. Begin morning routine.
- Circle Time: Everyone comes together to learn of the day's activities and make choices for center time.
- Center Time: Children choose from activities in centers which include: dramatic play, math, puzzles and manipulatives, blocks, art, sand and water table, library, writing, music and movement and computers. Learning is child centered through play.
- Clean Up: Children learn when it is time to stop an activity, follow directions, and put away toys and materials where they belong. This takes cooperation from the classroom community.

- **Story Time:** Teachers read to children throughout the day, with a variety of materials: big books, poems, rhymes, and thematic literature. Reading and discussion of books enhances listening skills, comprehension, questions and conversation, and develops concepts about print and vocabulary.
- **Music and Movement:** Children express themselves through their response to music, songs and by playing instruments. This activity also promotes the importance of daily exercise.
- **Small Group Instruction:** Children receive instruction in small groups, or individually, specifically to meet their ability level in language, literacy and math concepts and skills. This instruction is given through a variety of hands on ways, using various instructional strategies.
- **Recess/Outdoor Time:** Weather permitting, children in prekindergarten classrooms have an opportunity to go outdoors on a daily basis. During this time, children will participate in a teacher planned activity and then have free time. While outdoors, children are encouraged to develop their large muscle skills through activities such as running, climbing, jumping, and throwing.
- **Learning/Play Centers:** Each classroom is arranged in learning centers. Children have time daily to select a center and the materials within those centers to work with. Please see below for a list of the centers and what children will learn in each.

In the **dramatic play center**, children:

- develop self-confidence through role-playing
- act out familiar situations
- assume family roles
- develop oral language skills, muscle coordination and early readiness skills
- develops vocabulary through communicating and interacting with peers

In the **math center**, children:

- recognize, describe and name shapes
- begin to create patterns
- begin to sort objects and talk about how the grouping was done
- count objects using one-to-one correspondence
- compare numbers of objects
- begin to identify/name numerals

In the **puzzles and manipulatives center**, children:

- develop visual discrimination
- practice eye-hand coordination
- practice problem-solving skills
- develop oral language
- develop self-confidence

In the **block center**, children:

- develop eye-hand coordination
- explore spatial relationships
- compare sizes and shapes
- develop large and small muscle coordination
- cooperate, by working and planning together

In the **art center**, children:

- explore with a variety of materials
- creatively express themselves
- experiment with colors, shapes, sizes and textures
- develop eye-hand coordination and fine muscle control

In the **sand and water table**, children:

- make comparisons
- measure
- develop eye-hand coordination
- explore measurements and weights
- develop oral language

In the **library center**, children:

- learn to respect and care for books
- imagine events and situations
- make connections to their own lives and experiences
- develop oral language through story-telling, retelling and dictating stories
- develop an interest in words and books
- sequence events
- develop book-handling skills

In the **writing center**, children:

- develop oral language
- draw pictures to share stories and/or information
- practice writing letters, familiar names and words with a variety of materials (sand, markers, crayons, stamps)
- create pieces to express themselves (cards, posters...)

In the **ABC center**, children:

- begin to identify/name upper and lowercase letters
- begin to make connections between letters and the sounds they make
- rhyming
- phonemic awareness (ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds)
- begin to write letters and words

In the **music and movement center**, children:

- experiment with motor activities through dance
- develop muscular strength and coordination
- sing, play instruments and make up songs
- move to music
- learn an appreciation for different musical genres

In the **computer center**, children:

- develop eye-hand coordination
- practice skills
- research new information

The Montessori Program

A typical Montessori environment encompasses the following:

- freedom of movement and freedom of choice for the children
- structure and order in the arrangement and sequence of the materials
- an atmosphere that is attractive, warm and inviting
- materials that provide active learning experiences
- vertical grouping (in the age ranges 3 to 6 years, 6 to 9 years, 9 to 12 years, 12 to 15 years)
- a closeness to nature and the natural world and activities and materials that reflect the reality of life, not fantasy

The Montessori Materials in the classroom can be divided into three main categories:

- Practical Life- Allow the child to do activities of daily life and therefore adapt and orientate himself in his society.
- Sensorial Materials- Allow the child to acquire clear, conscious, information utilizing all of his senses and to be able to then make classifications in his environment.
- Academic Materials- Reading, Math, Geography

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS)

Our goal is to promote and aid in the development of your child's positive social emotional development. Through classroom activities, we support children in gaining respect for themselves and others. A successful positive behavioral support process occurs only in a nurturing and supportive environment.

Pyramid Model (<http://www.nysecac.org/news-and-events/pyramid-model/>)

The goal of the pyramid model is to promote children's success by:

- Creating an environment where EVERY child feels good about coming to school.
- Designing an environment that promotes child engagement and success.

- Focusing on teaching children what TO DO!
 - Teach expectations and routines.
 - Teach skills that children can use in place of challenging behaviors.

Attendance Policy

The Prekindergarten program meets 6.5 hours per day and follows the City School District of Albany's academic calendar.

It is vital to your child's overall development to be on time and be in attendance daily. This helps to promote a sense of community, provide structure and a routine to the day for your child. Children thrive on structure, want to be part of a group and need to know what to expect throughout the day. Inconsistent attendance and late arrival time could pose difficulty for your child, causing anxiety.

Please call the school and/ or program site if your child will be late or will not be attending school on any school day. Please refer to the Health Regulations if you are unsure about whether or not to send your child to school because of illness.

The City School District of Albany strives for our students to maintain a 95% attendance rate, which is the equivalent of no more than nine (9) excused absences per school year. Attendance, including tardiness (late arrival), and absences are closely monitored. For each absence, if you have not contacted the school or program site directly, an appointed attendance person will call you to document why your child is not in school.

The definitions of excused and unexcused absences follow:

Excused absence

The child is sick and unable to attend school for 1-2 days. The parent makes a call to the school to report the illness. The parent brings or sends a note to school about the absence.

The child is sick and missed 3 or more consecutive days of school. The parent makes a call to the school to report the illness. The parent brings a note from the child's doctor.

The child misses school because of the death of a family member (up to 5 days unless there are extenuating circumstances). The parent returns to school with his/her child, writes a formal note and brings a copy of the obituary or death notice to the child's teacher

Unexcused absence

The child does not attend school and no documentation is provided to the school or program for the absence.

Consequences

5 Unexcused absences – Letter from the principal and/or program director

10 Unexcused absences – Second letter from same with a warning that the Pre-K student is in danger of losing his/her seat

15 Unexcused absences – Child is terminated from the program; final letter is generated

Note – These do not have to be consecutive unexcused absences.

It is important that your child come to school each day and on time in order to reap the many benefits of our early childhood programming. We will make every effort to support you with this.

Child Drop off and Pick up

Drop off and pick up times are specific to each program location. Please do not drop off your child earlier than the schedule time, as teachers are preparing for the day. At the end of the day, please be prompt in picking up your child. Teachers often have other commitments, such as training, staff meetings or conferences with parents at the end of the day.

Transitions

Into Pre-K

Helping children to say good bye or separate from their parents is an important part of our program. This may be your child's first experience with separation, and it is vital that we work as a team and are sensitive to your child's needs and feelings.

In order to ease the transition, it is helpful for teachers and parents to work together. Through our experience, we know that when a parent feels comfortable in the program so will the child. The building of a relationship between parents and teachers is the foundation for the child's positive experiences.

Here are some things you may do to support your child as they transition into the program:

- Show your child where to keep his or her personal belongings in the classroom. You may want to hang a picture of you and your child in their cubby.
- Reassure your child that someone will be there to pick them up and that they are safe.
- Let your child know that you are interested in this new experience and you cannot wait to hear all about their day.

If you have any concerns or questions about how your child is doing, please speak with the teachers.

The amount of time it takes for your child to transition depends on many factors. Sometimes a child phases in easily, and then needs extra support later in the year.

Some children may take months to feel comfortable in the program. The teachers have experience and training to understand the developmental task of separation and are implementing activities and routines to support this process.

From Pre-K to Kindergarten

A transition plan was created that outlines specific activities to support a successful transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten. Some of the activities include interactions and visits with Kindergarten teachers and writing letters to current K students with questions students may have, which they respond to.

Snow Days

When the weather is snowy or the roads are dangerous, we may sometimes close school. Information of school closings can be found through the following sources:

- City School District of Albany website: www.albanyschools.org
- Times Union website: www.timesunion.com
- Television:
 - WRGB- channel 6
 - WTEN- channel 10
 - WNYT- channel 13
 - YNN- channel 9

Toys from Home

Young children are learning to share their belongings and sometimes have difficulty in this area. It is also upsetting if something is lost or broken at school. We request children refrain from bringing personal items to the classroom. Individual teachers will set their own policies for “show and tell” items. Toy guns or toy weapons are **NOT** allowed at school.

Clothing

In our active, hands-on environment, the children will be engaging in daily experiences with art, science and music and movement. They need to be free to paint, dance and run. Please put them in casual clothes that can get dirty in. The children will do best in comfortable, functional clothing and sturdy shoes/sneakers. Party shoes and sandals are discouraged, as they are not safe for active outdoor play. We go outside at least once every day. Your child should be equipped for changes in the weather. Sometimes a beautiful, warm morning can turn into a chilly afternoon.

Each child needs to have a complete change of clothes, clearly labeled with your child’s name. Parents need to replace clothing that is sent home, as well as make seasonal changes. All outerwear should be marked with the child’s name.

Field Trips

Field trips are a wonderful way to enrich the educational experience for your child. Occasionally, we may take a trip to the library, fire station and museum or attend a local performance. A release form must be signed before your child goes on a field trip. For some field trips, your child's teacher may ask for parent volunteers to join the class on the excursion.

Parent/School Connection Communication

Memos, reminders and announcements will be placed in your child's home folder and/or put into their backpack. We ask that you review the home folder and/or check your child's backpack every night as sometimes notices are time sensitive and request a reply.

Newsletters

Teachers will send home weekly classroom newsletters highlighting the theme and learning experiences as well as a brief note specific to your child: a noticing, a funny statement or a new skill learned.

The Early Childhood Department will send home monthly to bi-monthly newsletters providing information with regards to free or low cost events in the city, activities that you can do at home to support early learning as well as a column that provides insight on early childhood best practices. This newsletter will also contain updates on the program, such as ways to successfully support the transition into kindergarten.

Homework

Homework in the prekindergarten classroom is typically a follow up to practice in class learning; no new concepts will be sent home as homework. Most homework will consist of Parent and Child Activities to be completed together as a family. All classrooms have lending libraries, where families can participate in borrowing a bag of five books to read and talk about at home. Once one bag is completed and returned, another can be borrowed.

Parent Teacher Conferences

Two formal dates are set aside for parent teacher conferences, one in the fall and one in the spring. Parents are encouraged to request conferences with teachers throughout the year as needed.

Reading Together Daily

Parents of preschoolers often ask what it is that they can do at home to prepare their child for future success in school. Any teacher will provide a quick response to that question ... Read to your child! Reading aloud strengthens children's interest in books and reading, develops language and listening skills, and is a critical factor in developing children into readers.

Your child loves to spend quality time with you. You are the most important person in their life. If you read books, they will too! Developing this passion in the critical preschool years will lead to a lifetime of literacy, and it is so simple: a book and some time.

We encourage you to visit the local branch of the Albany Public library in your neighborhood. The library offers workshops throughout the year for children and families as well as opportunities to choose books that are similar to those read in your child's classroom.

Family/School Partnership

The City School District of Albany is committed to a positive family/staff partnership. This partnership reinforces our mutual goal for a positive educational experience for your child.

Parent input is important to help our department gauge how our program is meeting the needs of your child and family. About midway through the program a parent survey will be sent home to gather your feedback on various topics; we utilize this information as we continue to reflect and monitor student progress and the program.

Committee on Preschool Special Education

The City School District of Albany is committed to making sure all students receive a quality education that fits within the framework of their individual needs. The Special Education Department provides specially designed instruction, services and programs to help meet the unique needs of students with disabilities.

If your child received early intervention services as an infant or toddler up to age three, and may still need special education, your service coordinator will assist you with transition planning and making a referral to the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE).

If your preschool-age child (3-5 years old) did not receive early intervention services, but has some delays or lags in development such as difficulty in talking, moving around, thinking, learning or is facing physical or behavioral challenges — you, or professionals who know your child, may make a referral to the chairperson of your school district's Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) who will assist you in completing the referral process.

Jane Figueroa – CPSE Chairperson

Harriett Gibbons Building
75 Watervliet Avenue
Albany, NY 12206
Phone 475-6145
Fax 475-6146

Health Regulations

As required by the New York State Education Department, you will need to submit proof that your child has had a complete physical exam and up to date immunizations. The immunization record will be reviewed to ensure compliance with NYS regulations. In the event your child becomes sick at school, we will contact you and request that you pick up your child.

Infection prevention:

To reduce the risk of children spreading illnesses to each other we will use the following procedures:

- Teaching children the appropriate way to wash their hands using soap and water.
- Teaching children to cover their coughs or sneezes using the elbow, arm or sleeve instead of the hand when a tissue is unavailable.
- Teaching children to properly dispose of tissues.

Please keep your child home if they:

- have a cold with a fever of 100.0 or greater
- AND/OR a communicable/contagious disease, for example pink eye, strep throat or head lice.

If your child does have a communicable/contagious disease please contact the school nurse.

Children who require taking medication at school will need to provide the school nurse with:

- A doctor's note stating medication, dosage and time of administration
- Parental permission for medication administration
- The actual medication

This applies to all medication to be administered at school, including Over the Counter (OTC) medication. Please be reminded that all medications need to be picked up at the end of the school year from the nurse.

Our expectation is that all incoming Prekindergarten students are potty trained upon entering school. It is recognized that for some children this may not be so due to medical issues. In such cases, a potty plan will be developed by the school nurse, teacher and parent. This document will be updated quarterly, or as needed, to remain current.

Reporting Child Abuse and Maltreatment

As early childhood educational professionals, we are mandated reporters of any suspicion of child abuse and/or maltreatment. If there are any concerns brought to our attention, we will carefully assess the situation before making a report to the New York State Wide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment.

Albany County Community Resources

- Albany County Department for Children, Youth and Families, (518) 447-7324
- Albany County Department of Health, (518) 447-4580
- Healthy Families Albany County, (518) 447-7054
- Immunization Program- Services for Infants and Children, (518) 447-4602

Diversity Statement

The City School District of Albany values diversity and is committed to reflecting the diversity in the community.

Contact Information

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