

Early Education Program Description

Whispering Pines Preschool is a private preschool, which provides educational and therapy services to young children with special needs (NYSED approved) as well as preschool early learning experiences (ELP)/Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK *) for typically developing children. With program sites located in Fulton, Montgomery, Schenectady and Schoharie counties we have provided services to young children since 1987. There is no direct cost to the parent for the services provided to children with special needs who are placed in our program by their home school district Committee for Preschool Special Education (CPSE). These services are funded through county and state funds designated for special education. While transportation is a service that may be provided to children with special needs, we encourage all parents to transport their own children whenever possible. Children enrolled in the Early Learning Program (ELP) are charged tuition for the ELP Program. For children enrolled in the Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK *) tuition is paid by their school district.

The ELP and UPK programs allow typically developing children and children with special needs to interact throughout the day. Research has shown considerable benefits of this type of integration, for all children. Children with special needs are provided with peer models and typical children benefit by learning about individual differences among people. There is also evidence that typical children in integrated classes show more altruism and empathy toward other people.

The staffing ratios in our preschool classrooms (typically 5:1) has allowed children who have not been successful in other UPK, daycare or Head Start placements to successfully participate and complete our preschool classroom program.

Regulations and Monitoring

New York State Education Department (NYSED) - Office of P-12 Education-Special

Education: NYSED approves preschool special education programs pursuant to section 4410 of the New York State Education Law. The approval and operation the Whispering Pines Preschool programs for preschool students with disabilities is made in a manner consistent the Regulations of The Commissioner of Education Pursuant to Sections 4410 of the Education Law Part 200 – Students with Disabilities. We are required to follow, in general, most of the regulations followed by public schools related to services for children receiving special education services including the certifications for school leadership and teaching. Our calendar days of operation are in general alignment with most school districts. We are also required to be open for a 30-day summer session. Our program is monitored regularly though the Office of Special Education which provides general supervision and monitoring of all schools serving New York State preschool age students with disabilities via a Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA) review completed periodically by our NYSED Regional Associate.

OCFS Day Care License: While our programs are school based classroom programs (we do not provide traditional day care for children) we are required under New York State *Social Services Law (SSL) § 390* and Child Day Care Regulations Part 418-1 for Child Day Care Centers to be licensed as a day care center and to follow the regulation related to this license because we have children on our program sites for more than 150 minutes a day.

Universal Prekindergarten Programs (UPK): Four of our program sites also participate as a community-based organization in providing UPK programs to children via a contract with their

school district. As such, these classrooms fall under the regulations set forth in Subpart 151-1 of the Universal Pre-Kindergarten standards (NYSED). Most of these classrooms are co-located in our classrooms for children with special needs (SCIS classrooms with both a regular education teacher and a special education teacher).

New York State Early Intervention Program (EIP): The EIP is administered by the New York State Department of Health through the Bureau of Early Intervention as established in Article 25 of the Public Health Law. Two of our program sites (Delanson and Amsterdam) also provide a center location for toddlers with special needs (18 to 36 months of age) to participate in a group developmental intervention program and to receive therapy services. Babies and toddlers under 18 months of age are served at home. The New York State Early Intervention Program (EIP) is part of the national Early Intervention Program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. To be eligible for services, children must be under 3 years of age and have a confirmed disability or established developmental delay, as defined by the State, in one or more of the following areas of development: physical, cognitive, communication, social-emotional, and/or adaptive.

Philosophy & Educational Approach

The philosophy of our school focuses on a view of the needs of the whole child and family. These needs are determined through discussion with the child's family, through formal diagnostic assessment and through daily observation and interaction with the child in the preschool classroom setting. The Whispering Pines curriculum is grounded in the educational premise that all children must be actively involved in the environment in order for learning to occur. Our curriculum is grounded on the educational premise that all children must be actively involved in the environment in order for learning to occur. The principle that preschool children actively make meaning in an integrated way is a foundational concept for our preschool curriculum. Children learn more effectively in an environment that draws from their own experiences and ideas. For young children the experiences that support their inclination to explore math, language, literacy, art, and science within meaningful moments of play and interaction are essential to building a preschool learning community. At the same time the curriculum provides children with new information and challenges, which can be assimilated into their learning experiences. In guiding children's integrated approach to learning, our teachers may use a variety of strategies (interactions, scaffolding, explicit instruction, modeling, demonstration, changes in the environment, experiences and materials, and adaptations/modifications/ differentiation especially important for children with special needs). By adapting the physical environment, materials, and the curriculum, teachers gain a better sense of individual children's strengths and abilities and how best to support their play and engagement in making meaning and progressing in their learning.

See WPP Philosophy Mission Curriculum for more detailed information.

Ability to Implement a Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program

To accomplish our program goals and meet the individual needs of each child in our program our preschool follows the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core (NYSPFCC) which describes the knowledge and skills that preschool children typically demonstrate with appropriate support. To implement this we have adopted the use of several curricular programs in our classrooms as well as our own framework aligned with the state learning standards (attached). Additionally, the school district has adopted specific curricula, which we utilize. In 2014-2015 the UPK teachers throughout the district developed curriculum units (District developed curriculum) for the classrooms to be used in conjunction with other curriculum materials. These units have been in use since this time. Additionally, both the WPP curriculum (aligned to NYSPFCC) and the Learning Without Tears Curriculum is available for teachers to use in their classrooms. This includes the Handwriting Without Tears program. Each

classroom has a copy of the Creative Curriculum version 6, which is aligned with the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core (NYSPFCC). Early literacy instruction in the CC-6 includes background knowledge, phonological awareness, expressive and receptive language; vocabulary development and phonemic awareness.

We have supplemented the adopted curricula to include materials that focus on early literacy knowledge with a focus on language, vocabulary, story sense, phonological and phonemic awareness. Our activities are designed to promote development paced at the child's level of function. Our daily schedules are designed to provide a balance between teacher-initiated and child-initiated learning activities. Each of our classrooms are arranged in learning centers that allow for both group and individual activities. Our teachers use intentional planning to focus instruction to meet differentiated learning styles of children so that what they've learned they can then apply to a more complex task, in a practical or authentic context. The nature of our co-located UPK/Special Classes Integrated Setting (SCIS) sets an environment in which differentiated learning styles of children is a key component.

Family Engagement Opportunities

Because we believe that early childhood education can be provided best when parents and the school work together as a team, we have many activities for parents to attend throughout the year. These include parent/teacher conferences, parent meetings and family picnics, parent helper days, special activities planned on each site which may include fall outdoor activities and our winter Polar Express night at the movies, and special holiday celebrations.

Parents are encouraged to observe their children in the classroom and to participate in activities with their children. We ask that they let us know when they will be in so that several parents are not here on the same day and at the same time, as this can be distracting and confusing for the children.

We invite parents to share special skills, talents and activities with all the children in the classroom. Computers, carpentry, story reading, baking or handicraft activities, to name a few, are viewed with delight by young children and you will get a chance first hand to be in class with your child. Parents, in the past, have shared their various collectibles, demonstrated their musical talents, and shared occupational experiences.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Individual parent-teacher conferences are offered at least twice during each year. Parents are strongly encouraged to attend these conferences with the teacher to discuss their child's development. During the conference the teacher provides information about the child's development as observed over the course of the semester and uses the time to set goals and answer questions. During the conference, parents receive a copy of our Developmental Summary on their child. All parents should feel free to request additional conferences any time during the year. In addition, informal communication of parent concerns, teacher concerns, and the sharing of special joys, sorrows, and accomplishments in their child's life is important and encouraged.

We have a daily notebook that goes back and forth between home and school and our classrooms use the Remind App. Remind is a communications tool that lets teachers text-message parents without exchanging actual telephone numbers. The texting is only one-way: Messages go directly from the teacher to the parent. Remind works as an efficient means to reinforce communication systems we already have in place. We use it to send a quick text message (many times including images and audio) to remind parents about important dates, schedule changes, field trips, or to tell them about special activities their child completed in school. We let parents know about this app during our orientation and back-to-school nights, introduce the service and share sign-up instructions with families.

Parent Workshops

Throughout the year we present social and educational parent workshops and gatherings. In order that these meetings might relate to the interests of parents, parent involvement in program planning is encouraged.

In the fall 2019, as a part of our expansion of the Pyramid model, a 6-week evening session, Positive Solutions for Parents, will be offered by our Social Worker to our families on the Amsterdam site. Child care will be provided during each of six two-hour sessions.

Parent Handbook

Each family receives a copy of our Parent Handbook at the beginning of each year and will receive an updated Parent Handbook as of the 19-20 school year.

Inclusion

Whispering Pines Preschool is a NYSED approved special education preschool provider (4410). We provide evaluation, education and therapy services to young children with special needs. Our program site in Amsterdam includes a nurse, social worker, speech, occupational and physical therapists and a school psychologist. Both children approved for special services and those who are in the classroom as peer models benefit from the supports provided routinely by therapy service providers in the classrooms. UPK children especially benefit from a more optimal child to staff ratio (5:1 rather than 9:1 for a typical UPK classroom) and from the two teacher model in which a regular education and a special education teacher are teamed in each of our SCIS classrooms. Because we have a full-time nurse on site children with special medical needs are also served (g tube feedings; catheter management; medications). We currently have several staff member who are bilingual. Dual language learners (Spanish/English) are placed in classrooms with these staff members whenever possible.