

# **RSD #17 Preschool Program**

## **Introduction**

Child development research has established that learning and development is most rapid in the preschool years. Early childhood education programs seek to enhance these formative years by using developmentally appropriate learning materials and play-based activities.

The Regional School District #17 Preschool Program is an inclusive program providing special education services to eligible children ages three to five years old. The program follows the guidelines and procedures in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Act which states, "A preschool child requiring special education and related services is entitled to a free and appropriate public education on and after his/her third birthday." The program includes typically developing peers who serve as role models, particularly in the areas of language, social and play skills.

We strive to help children develop their potential with a play-based, language-rich program to foster growth in all areas of development. Active learning opportunities are created throughout the day during activities such as "circle time," facilitated play centers, gross and fine motor activities, snack or lunch time, and outdoor play on a developmentally appropriate playground. While the program is designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities through the implementation of their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), the play-based model provides opportunities for the growth and engagement of all students in a fun, interactive, child-centered environment.

The Preschool Program is located in Killingworth Elementary School. There are two preschool classrooms staffed by special education preschool teachers. The program is supported by paraeducators, a speech and language pathologist, an occupational therapist, a physical therapist, and a board certified behavior analyst. A school psychologist provides consultation and conducts evaluations as needed. The Director of Student Services oversees the program in partnership with the building principal.

## **Instructional Program**

The Preschool Program utilizes the State of Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) which outline what children from birth to age five should know and be able to do. Our primary instructional resource is Creative Curriculum, a research-based program that focuses on building children's confidence,

creativity, and critical thinking skills through meaningful play and hands-on, project-based investigations.

### **Hours of Operation**

The preschool program is open four mornings per week for 3 year-olds from 8:20 am to 11:10 am and five afternoons per week for 4 year-olds from 12:10 pm to 3:05 pm. However, the number of days each student attends depends on his/her Individualized Education Program, specifically, the amount of time necessary for each child to master his or her goals and objectives. Some students require services 2 days per week, whereas others may require a full week of instruction and therapies.

The preschool program follows the RSD 17 school year calendar.

### **Eligibility for Special Education**

Students may be referred to special education by their parents, Birth to Three clinicians, medical providers, school staff members, or others. Concerns are discussed in a planning and placement team (PPT) meeting which is composed of the child's parents or guardians, teachers, related service staff and school administrators (or administrative designee).

To determine a child's eligibility for special education services he/she will be assessed in one or more of the following areas depending on the suspected area of delay:

- Cognition
- Speech/Language
- Communication
- Self-help skills
- Social/emotional functioning
- Fine/gross motor skills

When the evaluation process is completed, the PPT will meet to review the results of the evaluation and determine whether the child is eligible for special education and related services. To be eligible for special education and related services, a child must be determined to have one of the following disabilities, and due to this disability, require special education and related services:

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness

- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment/attention deficit
- Specific learning disability/dyslexia
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment including blindness
- Developmental delay (only for ages 3-5)

If the child is found eligible, the PPT designs an individualized education program (IEP). If the child is demonstrating a significant delay characterized by the criteria below, he/she may be eligible for the preschool program, as well:

- A score of 2.33 standard deviations below the mean in one functional area or a score of 1.5 standard deviations below the mean in two functional areas.
- Clinical judgment may be used to determine eligibility for children with complicated developmental or medical histories who may not otherwise qualify.

RSD #17 offers a continuum of services for eligible students ranging from outpatient (or itinerant) speech and language therapy to participation in the preschool program. Recommendations for programming are made by the PPT. An extended school year program that takes place in the summer is provided for eligible students with disabilities as determined by the PPT.

### **Acceptance of Role Model Peers**

We encourage Haddam and Killingworth families to consider the RSD #17 Preschool Program for their child. To be accepted as a role model, children must be at least 3 years old by the following September, toilet-trained and pass a preschool screening which assesses cognitive, speech-language, motor and social skills. Screenings for role models typically begin in January of the school year prior to enrollment. The screening process is fun and play-based, and most children enjoy the opportunity to explore the preschool classrooms - particularly the novel toys! During that time, the preschool team will observe students' communication, play and social skills to determine whether they would be a good fit for the program. Eligible students are

selected from a lottery and pay tuition of \$1500 per year (monthly or in full).  
Transportation must be provided by the parents.

### **Additional Information**

To find out more about the RSD #17 Preschool Program, please contact Dr. Lindsay-Stevens, Director of Student Services at [Klindsay-stevens@rsd17.org](mailto:Klindsay-stevens@rsd17.org) or 860-345-4244.

For more information about what children learn in a high-quality preschool program, please check out the following link from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC):

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/what-do-children-learn-preschool-program>

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood has a website that also contains helpful information for families: <https://portal.ct.gov/oec>