

Mike Daria, Ed.D.
Superintendent

James Darin Pope, Ed.D.
Deputy Superintendent

Terri Byrts, Ed.D.
Director of Literacy

Diane Hilliker
Coordinator of Pre-K

PRE-KINDERGARTEN HANDBOOK

TUSCALOOSA CITY SCHOOLS
TCS

PRE-K HANDBOOK

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TUSCALOOSA CITY SCHOOLS PRE-K OVERVIEW

I. Overview

The Tuscaloosa City Schools has a rich history of support for Pre-Kindergarten Education. In 1993, TCS piloted six Pre-Kindergarten classrooms across the district. Two years later, the district was awarded a Federal Magnet Grant to establish a Montessori Preschool Program at University Place Elementary. In 1997, the district expanded its Pre-K program to include nine classrooms. In 1998, TCS received an Even Start Family Literacy Grant for Northington and Alberta Elementary Schools. Two years later, the district was awarded an Appalachian Regional Commission Grant for an additional Pre-K unit at Northington Elementary.

After a decade of Pre-K programs, TCS recognized the need for early intervention among our students. In 2004, TCS revised the admission policy to ensure those students who were most academically at-risk received admission to the Pre-K program. In 2006, a decision was made to merge our Special Education Pre-K Program and offer full inclusion; yielding fourteen Pre-K classrooms across the elementary schools. This same year Mayor Walt Maddox launched the Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative to expand and enhance our Pre-K programs. This initiative significantly increased community support for the program and our services for children. In 2011, the district applied for and received an additional OSR (Office of School Readiness) grant. In 2012, the district expanded our program with the addition of five OSR classrooms. Since 2012, the district has expanded to thirty-two general education Pre-K classrooms and six Special Education Pre-K classrooms for both three and four-year-olds.

The vision of the TCS Pre-K program is to ensure all four-year-old children are afforded the opportunity to receive a high-quality education. The mission of our program is to provide outstanding preschool education, health services, and enrichment opportunities for our children and families.



PRE-K ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

II. Pre-Kindergarten Enrollment Requirements

- Age

Students must be four (4) years of age on or before September 1. A birth certificate is required for all applicants.

- All children must be fully toilet trained before entering school in August in order to be eligible for Pre-K.

III. Application Window

Applications are accepted each school year starting in January. Applications received during the February application window are given first priority. Parents can apply at prek.alaceed.alabama.gov.

IV. Selection Process

Students who apply to grant funded classrooms are selected by lottery. As part of grant requirements, these schools must hold a public lottery to determine which children are selected for the program. In the event there are less applicants than Pre-Kindergarten slots available, all applicants for these schools will be selected for the program. In the event there are more applicants than slots available, students will be placed on the waiting list in the order on which names are drawn in the lottery.

V. Student Placement

- School Residency Zones

Whenever possible, students are placed within the residential school zone of the Pre-Kindergarten student. If spots are filled at a student's zoned school and there are spots at other school in the district, the Pre-K Coordinator can place students in available spots outside their zone. Students who are placed at schools outside of their residency zone for Pre-Kindergarten will return to their zoned school for kindergarten.

- Transfer Requests

A request for transfer will be directed to the Pre-K Coordinator. Requests for transfer are prioritized and honored whenever possible. There are, however, many times when a request cannot be accommodated due to class size limitations.

Students who move prior to placement of Pre-K students should contact the Pre-K Coordinator at the TCS Board of Education and provide updated residency information. Students who move during the school year, should provide new proofs of residency and request a transfer. The student will be placed on the transfer waiting list. When and if a slot becomes available in the new residential zone, the student will be given priority placement.

Students who are transferred to schools outside of their residency zone for Pre-Kindergarten will return to their zoned school for kindergarten.

- Waiting List

Pre-Kindergarten students who are not selected in the lottery are placed on a waiting list. As Pre-K slots become available, students are offered the opportunity to enroll in Pre-Kindergarten.

PRE-K ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

- Student Withdrawals
Students who move out of the Tuscaloosa City School Zone are not eligible to attend the Pre-Kindergarten program. All withdrawals should be reported to the Pre-K Department. Students who move during the final month of school, may be permitted to complete the school year upon request.

Students who are experiencing difficulty in adjusting to the school environment should be reported to the Pre-K Coordinator so a plan of action can be developed with the local school team. After a plan of action has been implemented, the team will reconvene to determine the effectiveness of the plan and make appropriate changes. Upon review of all information, a determination will be made by the team regarding the student's continuation in the Pre-K Program. A Pre-K student may be removed from the Pre-K program for failure to comply with the TCS Code of Student Conduct. Students who are removed from the program will be given the opportunity to participate in the TCS Parent as Teachers (PAT) program, if space is available

- Transition to Kindergarten
In the spring, Pre-K students are required to submit updated proofs of residency. Upon submission of these documents, students are automatically enrolled at the school within their designated school zone.

VI. Pre-Kindergarten Procedures

- Transportation
Transportation is not provided for Pre-K students unless it is a hardship case, determined by.... Transportation must be approved by the local school social worker and the Coordinator of Social Work. Students living within two miles of the school are not eligible for transportation. Transportation is not provided for students attending a school outside of their residency zone, unless transportation is required by the student's Individualized Education Plan or the McKinney-Vento Act (homeless/displaced students).

Students approved for transportation through the school social worker must be escorted to and from the designated bus stop by the parent/guardian or other designee who is at least 18 years of age. If a parent/guardian or other designee is not present upon drop-off, the student will be returned to the local school for parent/guardian pick-up. Upon the first incident, a phone call will be made to the parent/guardian reminding them of their obligation. Any subsequent incidents will result in the loss of transportation privileges.

- Attendance
Pre-Kindergarten students are expected to follow the policies and procedures outlined in the Tuscaloosa City Schools' Student Code of Conduct. Since attendance is closely linked to academic success, all Pre-Kindergarten students are expected to attend school every day. In the event a child is

PRE-K ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

absent from school, the parent should send a note or medical excuse within 72 hours of the absence. If a parent note or medical excuse is not provided within 72 hours, the absence is considered unexcused.

The following procedures will be followed for all Pre-K absences:

1. When students are absent from school, the TCS will send an automated phone call to the parent/guardian. Whenever possible, teachers are also encouraged to contact the family.

2. If a student has five (5) unexcused absences or fifteen (15) tardies, the local school will complete an Early Warning Referral and submit this to the TCS Attendance Office. The parent/guardian will receive a Notice of Pre-K Early Warning which requires the parent/guardian and child to attend a meeting at the TCS Board of Education. At this meeting, a team will work with the family to develop a plan for improving attendance.

3. Withdrawal of Student from Program
Pre-K students who miss 10 consecutive days without a doctor's excuse, will be removed from the program. Students who are removed from the program will be given the opportunity to participate in the TCS Parent as Teacher (PAT) program, if openings are available.

- Student Behavior
All students enrolled in the TCS must comply with the Code of Student Conduct. Pre-Kindergarten students are expected to follow these same guidelines for acceptable student behavior. At TCS, we realize Pre-Kindergarten is often the first school experience for most children, therefore, Pre-K students often need time to adjust to the school environment. The Pre-Kindergarten classroom fosters a classroom community and teaches students about acceptable behavior for school.

For most students, this core behavioral instruction ensures a safe and positive learning environment for all. When students continue to have difficulty adjusting to the school environment, the local school will work collaboratively with the student, family, counselor, principal, Pre-K Coordinator, and Social Work Coordinator to develop a plan for success. After this plan of action has been implemented over time, the team will reconvene to determine next steps. The plan will be revised as needed to help ensure student success. If these efforts are unsuccessful, the team will determine whether the student's behavior is detrimental to the safety and learning of other children and if removal from the program is necessitated.

- Health Screenings
An annual health screening is offered to all Pre-Kindergarten students enrolled in the TCS. The parent/guardian must give written permission for the student to participate in health screenings. This screening is offered in collaboration with community partners, such as The University of Alabama Capstone Medical School, UA Capstone College of Nursing, and the Shelton State Community College Nursing Program. Comprehensive health screenings include vision, hearing, dental, and physical health. Students are assessed for many health-related issues. A finger prick is included to check for lead, glucose, and cholesterol levels. Over the years, these screenings have assisted many families in diagnosing problems, preventing health problems, and receiving health services.

PRE-K ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

VII. Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum

- Standards-Based Curriculum
The TCS aligns the Pre-K curriculum and instruction with the Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children. These standards address nine areas of development and align with the kindergarten standards found in the Alabama Courses of Study developed by the Alabama State Department of Education. These standards include: a) language and literacy, b) mathematics, c) science and environmental education, d) health, e) fine arts, f) technology, g) physical development, h) social-emotional development, and i) approaches to learning.

b. Assessment
Students enrolled in First Class Pre-K classrooms funded by the Alabama Department of Children's Affairs are assessed using the Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment. This assessment includes the use of authentic assessments to determine progress toward developmental benchmarks. These benchmarks are closely aligned to the Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children.

Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment benchmark reports are completed three times each year. A minimum of two (2) parent conferences are held each year to discuss the Pre-K student's growth in each of these areas.

- Field Trips
Pre-Kindergarten students are allowed to attend two off-site, school-sponsored field trips with parent permission. Students must be transported by bus (TCS or charter) and must follow all seating safety requirements. TCS uses booster seats and harnesses which meet the transportation safety requirements for four-year-old children. Teachers are encouraged to use on-site field trips that do not require transportation throughout the year.

The following procedures for planning and implementation of Pre-Kindergarten Field Trips have been collaboratively developed:

- Each bus may transport 18 students and three (3) adult Pre-K teacher chaperones.
- Pre-Kindergarten field trips will be limited to two buses/one trip per day.
- Pre-K field trips will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis.
- All other TCS requirements and procedures related to field trips must be followed, per the TCS field trip procedure.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ's)

1. My child is zoned for Elementary School A. May I request my child attend Elementary School B?

   Students will attend zoned schools unless the classes are full and there are vacant spots at other schools. Parents can call the Pre-K Coordinator at the Central office if there are any zoning questions.

2. Why are some Pre-K classrooms designated as First Class Pre-K Classrooms and others are not?

   The TCS currently has 38 Pre-K classrooms across the district. Of these classrooms, 30 receive First Class Pre-K state grant funds and are therefore designated a First-Class Pre-K classroom. There are specific requirements of the grant, which may be different from district-funded classroom requirements. We are required to adhere to these guidelines, or we could possibly lose the grant funding. All of the classrooms must have the same furniture, materials, supplies, toys, learning games, and teacher training. You should not be able to look at a classroom and know if it is a grant funded or general funded classroom.

3. Does the school system offer any type of school program for three-year old children?

   At the age of three, the district serves students with diagnosed disabilities. If your child has a diagnosed disability, please contact our Special Education Services department for more information. Although we are unable to provide school based general education services to three-year children, the Parent as Teachers (PAT) is a home-based program offered to families within the district. For more information, contact the Pre-K department.

4. What curriculum does the Pre-K program use?

   The TCS aligns the Pre-K curriculum and instruction with the Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children. These standards address nine areas of development and align with the kindergarten standards found in the Alabama Courses of Study developed by the Alabama State Department of Education. These standards include: a) language and literacy, b) mathematics, c) science and environmental education, d) health, e) fine arts, f) technology, g) physical development, h) social-emotional development, and i) approaches to learning.

5. Will my child receive a report card?

   Pre-K students do not receive progress reports or report cards. Teachers will conference with parents to discuss student progress.

6. How much does in cost to attend Pre-K in Tuscaloosa City Schools?

   Pre-K is free of cost for our parents.

TUSCALOOSA CITY SCHOOLS PRE-K



































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