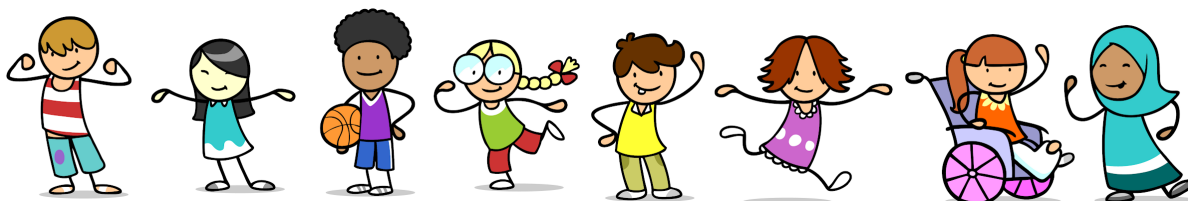


Plains Preschool Program: An Information Guide

South Hadley Public Schools



Plains Elementary School

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESCHOOL TEAM



Dear Families and Caregivers,

Welcome, and welcome back, to what will surely be another productive and fun year of preschool! It is our sincere vision to make this extraordinary time of early learning an engaging and exciting time of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth for your student.

In preschool, we realize that there is a very, very wide range of abilities and interests among students and our goal is for all students to participate in the activities to the best of their ability as they learn new skills enabling them to develop important school readiness, communication, social, and preacademic skills for future success.

We understand that preschool is the first formal educational experience for many children and we strive to build effective relationships with our students and families as part of a strong educational foundation. We are passionate about ensuring positive early childhood experiences that impact the entire lifespan and are happy to be a part of your student's development.

Plains Preschool will be using **ClassDojo®** as the 'go to' virtual classroom platform where you can access information about classroom learning, upcoming events, and important announcements.

Again, **WELCOME!** We are happy that you are here and looking forward to working together to make this a spectacular year!

Warmly,

The Preschool Team

MESSAGE FROM THE PLAINS SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Families and Caregivers,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Plains School Community in South Hadley! We are the early childhood school in town with students from preschool to grade one. It is a wonderful place where children begin their educational journey. We are a joyful, exciting, engaging and exceptionally caring group of educators with the goal of making your child's experience the most memorable possible. We enroll approximately 350 children with a staff of 70 which consists of certified teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, an adjustment counselor, a nurse, and consultants to support both academic and social/emotional growth.

We continue to rely on parent feedback to ensure that we are in touch with community needs. Our philosophy is based on the research that supports creating an environment that is nurturing, caring and supportive. The trusting relationship we have developed with our families is essential in our work to provide for our early learners. We communicate often and attempt to keep you informed of all school policies, programs, and events. The administration will use both electronic and personal contact, as do all school staff.

I look forward to working with your family this school year. Thank you for your support. Feel free to contact me at the school office or via email.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Carla M. Lussier

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES

Dear Preschool families:

Welcome to Plains Elementary School! The preschool experience launches the school career for your child – a career that we anticipate will be very successful. The Plains staff is committed to providing a comprehensive program to help build a strong foundation for learning that we hope will last a lifetime. The primary goals of early childhood education are to promote independence, self-confidence, self-esteem, and an enthusiasm for learning. These qualities are essential to future educational success.

The Plains Preschool program is designed to provide children with a safe, secure, and nurturing environment in which they can learn about themselves, each other, and the world around them. We follow the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Preschool, which address development of the whole child in areas including cognition, communication, social interaction, play skills, motor abilities, and self-help skills. One of the most important keys to a positive school experience is the school / home partnership. Our ability to create a strong relationship with each family is an important feature of this school and I welcome you to the South Hadley Schools family.

This information guide provides a great deal of information and combined with the Plains Family Handbook will answer most, if not all, of your questions. There are, however, many things that happen at school that are unique to the preschool community. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your child's teacher or call me. We are always happy to answer your questions or find the answer if we do not have an immediate reply.

Sincerely,

Beth Cooke

PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

The Plains Preschool team believes that all children are capable of learning and that positive early childhood experiences lay the foundation for a child's entire lifespan. Because the early years are critical, we believe that children who may be at risk for future academic or developmental difficulty (and their families) must be identified and serviced in the most appropriate setting as early as possible by knowledgeable and qualified individuals to ensure the best outcomes. We also believe that children learn best through play and understand that play is the important, vital 'work' for young children that teaches them how to organize, navigate and thrive in their environment and their community. Thus, educational and therapeutic efforts should occur in a manner that is fun, engaging, and natural for young children.

Guiding Principles

The critical ideas/concepts in understanding and implementing the guiding principles for preschool learning experiences are:

- All children are capable of learning.
- There are individual differences in rates of development among children.
- Knowledge of child growth and development is essential to maximize educational experiences for children and for program development and implementation.
- Early learning and development are multidimensional; development domains are highly interrelated.
- Young children learn by doing, and need to be provided with varied opportunities to explore and experiment with concepts through play and hands-on activities in their natural environment.
- Families are the primary caregivers and educators for their young children.

PROGRAM DETAILS

The South Hadley School District Preschool Program was established in 1988 as a special education program that educates students with and without disabilities and is housed within Plains Elementary School. Kindergarten and first grade students also attend Plains Elementary School, making it a true early childhood school setting. The preschool program follows the [South Hadley Public Schools District Calendar](#) and operates during the typical school year from September through June.

Children three years of age are potentially eligible for preschool. However, unlike other grades in the district, children three years of age residing in South Hadley are not automatically eligible to attend our program as it is a special education program with specific eligibility criteria for both students receiving special education services and those who are peer partners. Eligibility for special education for all preschool aged students is determined by a multidisciplinary team that includes the student's family. To be considered for our program as a peer partner, your child must pass the preschool screening and meet the criteria for eligibility. For more information, please see our "Application and Enrollment Process" section on the school website

The Plains Preschool Program runs Monday through Thursday, with no preschool on Fridays. Our sections of preschool include half-day programs; a morning and an afternoon session. There is also a full day option that is based upon the needs of our student population. There are currently four preschool classrooms in operation at Plains Elementary School.

The majority of our preschool sections are inclusive meaning that students with and without identified disabilities learn alongside each other. Each inclusive section has a maximum of fifteen students. In order for our program to be successful, peer partners from the community are invited to learn in our specially designed, integrated early childhood classrooms, where all benefit from effective and engaging experiences tailored to meet the needs of all students. The district does charge tuition for our peer partners. Peer partners are selected through our screening process.

All sections of preschool are taught by licensed teachers and highly qualified support staff. In addition, students in preschool have the benefit of being supported by clinicians and service providers who are experts in their field and who work closely with the classroom teacher and student teams to ensure the success of all students in the public school setting. Such providers include speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, behavior analysts, a school psychologist, and an adjustment counselor.

The Plains Preschool team continuously assesses the needs of the current and incoming student population and plans appropriate and meaningful programming to meet those needs. At this time, we currently have one section of preschool that is considered substantially separate and is specifically designed for students who require intensive support in the educational setting. The instructional methodology in the substantially separate setting includes Applied Behavior Analysis, ABA, and is taught by a special educator in collaboration with a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, BCBA.

DAYS & HOURS OF OPERATION

Preschool Program Days & Hours of Operation			
Days	Morning (AM)	Afternoon (PM)	Full Day (FD)
Monday	9:00 - 11:30 a.m.	12:30 - 3:00 p.m.	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Tuesday	9:00 - 11:30 a.m.	12:30 - 3:00 p.m.	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Wednesday	9:00 - 11:30 a.m.	12:30 - 3:00 p.m.	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Thursday	9:00 - 11:30 a.m.	12:30 - 3:00 p.m.	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

**The Plains Preschool Program follows the [South Hadley Public Schools Calendar](#).*

INCLEMENT WEATHER

In the case of inclement weather, please check your local news channels or school website for closing notifications. The district will also phone families via 'robocall' to inform you of closures and/or delays.

***Please note:** If there is a two-hour delay, there will be NO morning preschool. Full day preschool students should arrive at 11:00 a.m., (two hours after our typical start time). Afternoon schedules are not affected by morning delays.

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

Arrival

We ask that you please be prompt and plan to arrive at 8:55 a.m. or 12:25 p.m., as adults are not available to supervise the children before this time. Students will enter via the preschool pod door. When you arrive at Plains, please enter through the black playground gate (to the right of the main front doors) and proceed down the sidewalk. The preschool entry is the 2nd door. To ensure safety and limit the traffic in and out of the school building, adults will not accompany their students into the building and students will be dropped off at the door of the preschool pod. Special arrangements may be made for students requiring additional support with transitions. These arrangements will be discussed between caregivers, classroom teachers, and/or service providers.

Dismissal

Your student's teacher will escort your student to the black playground gate for dismissal (rain or shine). Please plan to line up along the sidewalk while waiting for your student.

***Please note:** If you are delayed at drop off or pick-up time, please go to the main office to sign in or pick-up your child.

IMPORTANT: WE MUST HAVE WRITTEN PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION BEFORE WE CAN RELEASE YOUR CHILD TO ANYONE OTHER THAN THE TYPICAL CAREGIVER. It is likely that a teacher/staff member will ask to verify the individual's identity via a license or picture identification card. Your student may also be asked to identify the person, if able.

TRANSPORTATION

Families are expected to transport their students to and from the preschool program. The yellow public school bus is not available to preschool aged students as daily transportation.

Specialized transportation via VanPool services is a special education service. As with all special education services, specialized transportation is based upon the individual needs of a student and is only available to a student if the student's special education team deems such services necessary and appropriate to enable the student to access the preschool program.

Transportation services will be discussed at your student's team meeting.

Specialized transportation is not available to peer partners under any circumstances as it is a special education service.

If you know that your student will be absent from school and/or will not require VanPool transportation on a given day/s, please contact VanPool services directly at **(413) 599-1616**.

If your student's health, behavior, or your family circumstances change and your student is in need of specialized transportation, please contact your student's teacher or the early childhood coordinator at **(413) 538-5068**.

ATTENDANCE, HEALTH POLICY & SAFETY

Attendance

Your student is expected to attend every scheduled class. It is crucial for children to have consistency and predictability to feel safe and comfortable, maximize their learning opportunities, and foster social relationships with peers. If you know that your student will be absent, please call the main office at (413) 538-5068 and/or email your student's teacher. Attendance is taken daily in all classrooms and recorded in the district database system.

Health Policy

At the Plains Preschool, we are committed to offering a safe and healthy environment for everyone who spends time here. We all need to be especially careful about contagious illnesses, since many parents and children come to the center.

Please help by staying home if you or your child(ren) has any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 100 or more within the past 24 hours.
- Very runny nose or yellow or green nasal discharge.
- Frequent sneezing or coughing.
- Sore throat.
- Vomiting or diarrhea within the past 24 hours.
- Very red, swollen, or watery eyes.
- Impetigo or rash (other than diaper rash).
- Unusually fussy or irritable child (if your child is overtired or is becoming sick, they can't function well in a group setting).

NOTE: If you have seen your doctor and s/he told you that these symptoms are due to something non-contagious (e.g. allergies) you may certainly come to the school, provided your child feels well enough to participate in normal activities. If your child becomes ill or seems unable to participate while in the classroom, we will call you and request that you come to pick up your child.

Please review the current district health and safety policy.

Safety

Preschool students participate in mandated fire, evacuation, and "lock-down" drills to ensure emergency preparedness. Before such events, students learn about safety and procedures as well as practice safety protocol with peers, teachers and support staff. You will be notified via robocall or email when formal drills occur. We may send home information about such drills and safety to practice with your students at home.

CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

Inclusive, Naturalistic, Play-Based Experiences

The preschool curriculum is designed to further the overall development of each child. Teachers design activities and curriculum based on the children's interests and guided by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. In preschool, we strive to create an environment that celebrates diversity in culture, language, ability and interests through the classroom environment and learning experiences. We implement instruction that includes a mix of center-based learning with peers as well as individualized, small group, and whole group activities daily.

A child-centered curriculum that incorporates learning objectives and multicultural learning into fun, engaging, and meaningful experiences is a staple in our classrooms. Our play-based approach is designed to reduce stress, ease transitions, and encourage students to take risks and solve problems while feeling safe and valued.

The Preschool Program follows the [Massachusetts Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks](#). Since these frameworks are more academic in nature and were designed for students identified as age "older fours to five", pre-academic and academic skills are incorporated into classroom learning centers and taught through explicit small and whole group instruction through varied activities. The emphasis of the preschool program of all students, aged three to five, is on the development of readiness skills and social emotional learning.

Learning takes place for children through a wide variety of play opportunities and interactions with both age level peers and adults. Through play they are able to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. Our classes are language rich environments. Children learn to be part of a larger group in a small nurturing early educational environment.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING, BEHAVIOR & CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Inclusion

The Preschool Team values inclusion in every sense of the word and we strive to create an inclusive environment that celebrates students, families, and staff from all cultures, family composition, languages, socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, and interests. Such diversity is represented and celebrated in our classrooms through meaningful interaction with others as well as through read aloud stories, discussions, videos, music, etc.

The center of a young child's world is the family and we celebrate our community of learners by sharing and learning about each other's families and families that may not be represented in our classrooms.

Schedule

All sections of preschool follow a predictable and flexible schedule to promote the safety and well-being of all of the students and allow for more autonomy in time management and planning. It can be challenging for students to deal with changes in routine. Therefore, we prepare students for expected and unexpected changes or deviations in schedule and explicitly teach coping strategies that promote flexibility and lifelong success.

Your students' daily schedule includes whole group learning times including a class meeting and circle time, play and hands-on activities in classroom learning centers, outdoor and/or indoor gross motor activities, and a designated time to practice fine motor skills during table time learning. Your student will also participate in a rotation of school wide "specials" such as gym, art, and library.

Social/Emotional Learning

During the early childhood years, children begin to understand the social world. In preschool, social emotional learning takes precedence as teachers and support staff model, facilitate, teach, and encourage each student's prosocial communication, social, and emotional regulation skills in a naturalistic play environment.

The classroom is designed with active learning centers, including dramatic play and blocks, that are often busy and bustling with energy and movement. In addition, each classroom has a quiet, calming area that students can access. The expectations, skills, and schemas for each center are taught and modeled by classroom teachers, support staff, and service providers, who understand child development and are skilled in teaching to each student's individual abilities.

Your student will be encouraged to identify the emotions of others and self. We implement elements of Second Step® curriculum and target objectives and standards found in the Massachusetts Social Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play and Learning (SEL APL) Standards. More information about these standards can be found [here](#).

MA SEL APL:

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/preschool-and-kindergarten-standards-in-social-emotional-development-and-approaches>

Behavior Management & Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

At Plains School, we implement a school wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) system. Our district mascot is the Tiger. Therefore, the students at Plains School are the district's "Tiger Cubs" and we practice our "PAWS" - **P**ause and think, **A**ct with kindness, **W**ork together, and **S**tay safe. For this system, expectations are explicitly taught and practiced and students earn "Tiger Tickets" collectively for their class. Once an entire class earns 20-25 tickets, the class and school celebrate with various rewards (e.g. dance party, pajama day, special activity, etc.).

In the classroom, expected behaviors are recognized and praised by both students and adults. Additionally, students and adults gently remind each other of the expectations and encourage positive behaviors.

Students requiring additional behavioral or social emotional support may participate in individualized or small group instruction with teachers, support staff, and service providers. These concepts are then reinforced in the group setting and during play in learning centers and at recess.

We encourage an open dialogue regarding relevant factors and important information that would affect your student's behavior (i.e. busy weekend, moving, family stress, bad night's sleep).

VISITING & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

As your student's caregiver, you are your child's first and most important teacher. We understand the value of teaming with families to ensure student success and are privileged to teach each student. We will work with you during the transition into preschool and hope that you will visit the classroom with your preschooler and meet your student's teacher prior to beginning preschool.

That said, we are continuously striving to increase family engagement opportunities for Plains School families and the community. During a typical school year, families are welcome to visit the classroom and lead activities and/or read a story to the group. If you are interested in visiting your child's classroom to lead an activity or read a story, please contact your student's teacher to plan on a mutually convenient time.

Because our program is a special education public school program, we are ethically and legally obligated to protect the identity and rights of all of the students. Therefore, we do not allow families to come and observe the classroom environment for extended lengths of time as there are often therapeutic special education services and supports provided in the classroom environment and we are bound to ensure confidentiality and privacy of all students.

That said, classroom teachers may take photos of specific activities and events and share with families via a virtual platform. If you do not wish for your student to be photographed, please inform your student's teacher or the main office.

HOME - SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Communication Folder

Communication between families/caregivers and school is a vital component of a successful and productive educational experience. All students will receive a home-school communication folder that will go to and from school with your student daily. All paper correspondence, student work as well as teacher and school wide announcements, will go home with your student in the communication folder. Likewise, all documents that require the attention of the teacher or need to be forwarded to the main office can come to school with your student in the folder.

Phone, Email & Digital Platforms, Etc.

Your student's teacher can be reached via phone and email during the school day 8:47 a.m - 3:25 p.m. You may also choose to speak with your student's teacher at drop-off and pick-up times. It is anticipated that teachers will respond to emails and/or voice mail messages within 48 hours.

District & School Announcements

District and school announcements regarding events, school cancellations, etc. will be made via a robocall and/or via school messenger system by a member/s of the school administration team.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parent teacher conferences are held in the fall and/or spring of the school year per district calendar. Your student's teacher will notify you of the times and allow the opportunity for families to schedule a conference at a mutually convenient time. You may also request a meeting/conference throughout the school year should you have concerns about your student's learning/development.

SUPPLIES, SNACK & LUNCH

Clothing

Children experiment with a wide variety of media while at school. They play in water, sand, dirt, clay, etc. We recommend that your student wear clothing that is conducive to the early childhood setting, meaning clothing that they can easily learn and play in. As hard as we try with smocks, children still get messy, and oftentimes children will hesitate to participate for fear of getting dirty. We also recommend closed toed shoes for safety and strongly recommend comfortable sneakers as they are the most appropriate for play. Please do not send your child in flip-flops or open toe sandals.

Please send in at least one complete set of clothing to be stored in your students backpack or cubby area. This includes underwear, socks, shirt, and pants. When dirty clothes come home, please send in a new set to replace the clothes sent home. If your student is toilet training, you may want to keep several sets of clothing at school. This can be discussed with your student's teacher.

For students who are not yet toilet training, please send in diapers and wipes to be stored at school. Diapering/toileting procedures should be discussed with your student's teacher and/or support team.

*All items will need to be **labeled** with your student's name or initials. This ensures that items are not misplaced

Appropriate outdoor clothing is necessary as we go outside in all kinds of weather and often enjoy play in the snow during the winter months. Your student's teacher will inform you when to bring in winter clothing that will include a warm coat, hat, snow pants, as well as mittens/gloves. During winter months, your student will also need sneakers to change into at school. Please DO

NOT send in slippers as students must wear appropriate shoes in the event that we need to exit the building.

For young children, we strongly encourage mittens and clothing items that your student can manage with minimal assistance from adults. This helps to promote independence and self-esteem when your student can complete tasks on their own.

Backpack

All students will have a cubby space where they can hang up their backpack and clothing items. We ask that you send your student to school with a backpack to easily transport items to and from school. If you are in need of a backpack and/or clothing items, please contact your student's teacher or main office at (413) 538-5068.

Snack

Students will have a daily snack during each section of the preschool program. Please send in an easily manageable snack and water bottle that is **labeled** with your student's name. If your student attends a full day program, please send in two snacks; one for the morning and one for the afternoon.

Lunch

Full day students will need to be sent to school with a lunch that is easy to manage with minimal adult support. We will not be able to heat or cook any items. Students may also purchase a school lunch and may apply for free/reduced lunch through the district.