



# Mixed-Age Instruction in Early Childhood Education

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**Rahway Public Schools  
Early Childhood Education Department  
Education Committee Meeting  
October 10, 2024**

# Preschool Mission Statement

The Rahway Public School's preschool program provides a safe, **developmentally appropriate, nurturing** environment that **promotes social, emotional, cognitive and physical growth**, as well as a **positive self-image** and a **love of learning**. The preschool program is recognized as a leader in the community for providing a strong foundation for future academic success.

# Traditional Program Design

26 total preschool classrooms:

16 classrooms in districts

- 14 four-year-old classes
- 2 three-year-old classes

10 classrooms in child care centers

- all 10 three-year-old classes

- ❖ We operate preschool out of 9 locations throughout the district
- ❖ Most of our PreK students must transition between 2-3 times before by the time they enter kindergarten

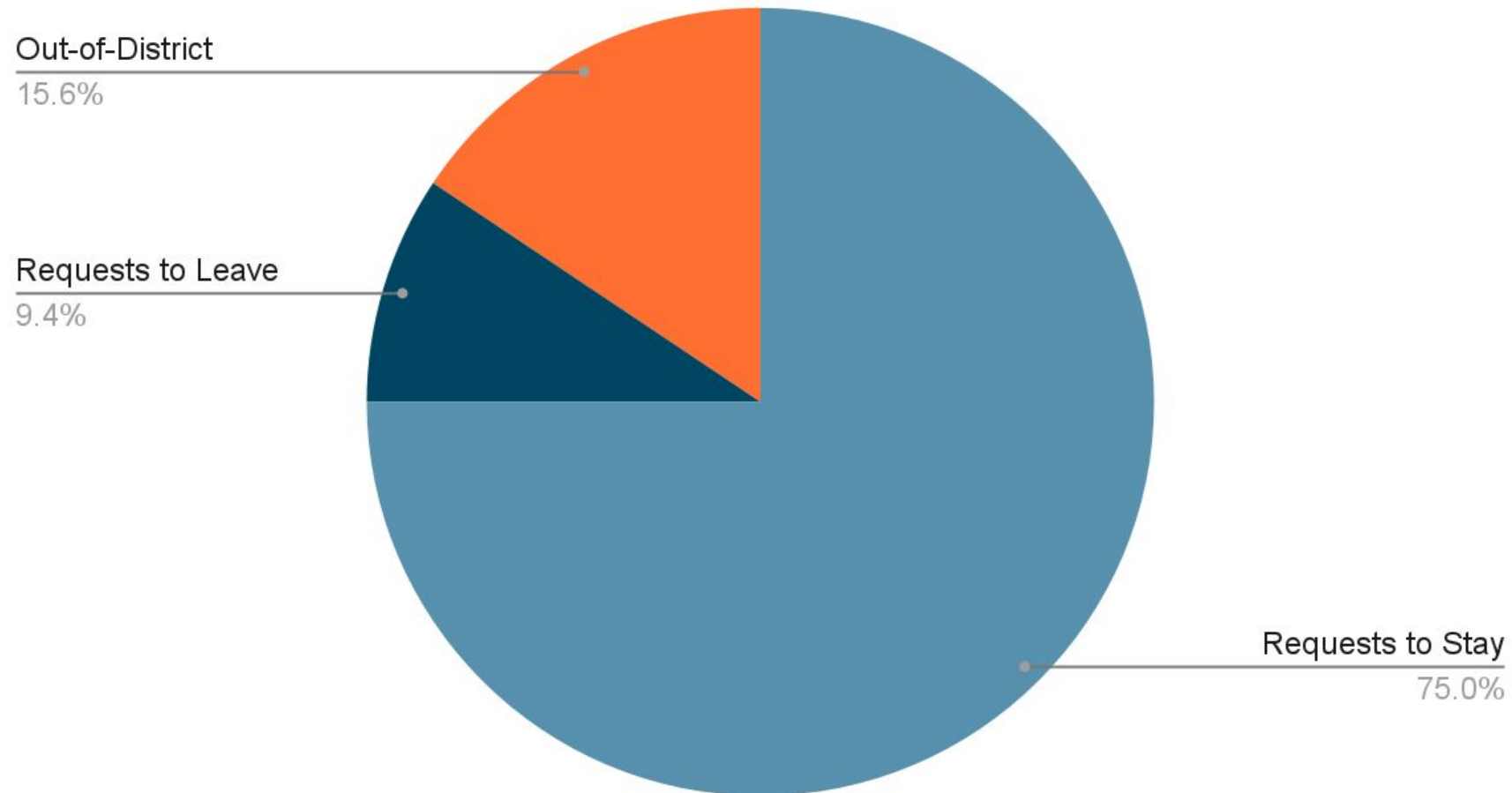
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# Administrative Challenges

1. ECE Department has traditionally transitioned a majority of our students each year into new buildings & classrooms
2. Parents want continuity of care for their young children

# Supporting Data

## Student Placement Requests After PreK3 SY



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# Program / Academic Challenges

1. Maintaining best practices for early childhood education throughout the program for all students
2. Lack of differentiation evident in classroom instruction
3. Better service to our students needing greater support

# Single-Focused Classroom Instruction

Standard 4.1: Children begin to demonstrate an understanding of number and counting.

- Use one to one correspondence to solve problems by matching sets and comparing amounts

Because students are separated by grade, teachers tend to teach using whole group strategies as opposed to more small group / individualized instruction methods as early childhood curriculum are designed.



# Single-Focused Classroom Instruction



# Definitions

## **Looping -**

the practice of keeping a group of children with the same teacher for more than a year.

## **Mixed-age Instruction -**

the practice of having students of different ages/grades in one class together. (PreK 3 & 4)

# Research Findings

**Overall, looping has been underutilized in the United States, despite the compelling evidence of its benefits.**

The practice essentially adds an extra month of teaching and learning time during the second year when the typical transitional period at the beginning of the year is virtually unnecessary.

In addition, teacher knowledge about a child's strengths and weaknesses increases in a way that is impossible to achieve in a single year.

- **Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2017, pp. 85-100. doi: 10.14434/josotl.v17i2.20840**

# Research Findings

The Montessori model is highly individualized and encourages independence, so children work at their own pace, which is a major benefit of multi-age grouping.

**Multi-age teaching is an undertaking, but well worth the effort, in terms of a child's overall development – academically, socially and emotionally.**

- Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2017, pp. 85-100. doi: 10.14434/josotl.v17i2.20840

# Modified Program Design

26 total preschool classrooms:

16 classrooms in districts

10 classrooms in child care centers

- all mixed-aged serving threes and fours

- ❖ Most students will remain in one class for 2 years; reducing transition by kindergarten to 1-2 times
- ❖ Reduces strain on registration process by eliminating the transfer of ~ 150 students each year

# Differentiated Classroom Instruction



## **Standard 4.3: Children begin to conceptualize measurable attributes of objects.**

- Work with children in small groups to help them organize (classify) objects, describe their work, and represent the results (e.g., children use a series of graphs to represent the results of experiences in sorting buttons by various attributes – size, color, number of holes, etc.).
- Invite children to compare and order objects according to measurable attributes (e.g., length, shape, size).
- Provide materials for children to sort, classify, order, and pattern (e.g., buttons, beads, colored craft sticks, bowls, trays).

# How our preliminary data supports mixed-age instruction

What are the benefits to older students learning with younger students?

- Increased comprehension as students become class leaders
- Social emotional skills strengthened

How is inclusion impacted by mixed-age... will learning be too complex for students with IEPs?

- Individualized supports still remain
- Peer models

What are the benefits to teachers?

- Knowledge of students
- Class role models from students looping

# Timeline for Rollout

**Sept 2023 -  
June 2024**

Piloting and  
data collection

**Sept 2024**

Additional  
piloting and  
feedback

**Oct 2024**

Information  
sessions for  
school  
community

**Feb 2025**

Parent Forum /  
Registration

**Sept 2025**

Full district  
implementation

## **Staff Professional Development & Peer Observations**

- Differentiated Instruction
- Expanding vocab. and comp. during Read Alouds
  - Use of Technology to support students

A large, abstract splash of red watercolor paint on a white background. The splash is irregular in shape, with darker red and maroon tones at the top and bottom, and a lighter, more vibrant red in the center. The edges are soft and feathered, while the interior shows some darker, more saturated areas.

THANK YOU