

# Highlands School District ■

## Pre-K Counts Family Handbook



### MISSION

“To enable all students to succeed in a changing world.”

### CORE VALUES

Respectful

Accountable

Motivated

Safe

Program Location:  
**Highlands Early Childhood Center**  
1060 Atlantic Avenue  
Brackenridge, PA 15014  
724-226-2400, Ext. 1600

Rev 7/30/2025

# Highlands School District Pre-K Counts Family Handbook

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to provide Pre-K Counts parents with basic information about the Highlands Pre-K Counts program. This handbook should be used as a resource guide for questions about the program. Parents may also contact the Pre-K Counts teacher and/or the secretary at the Highlands Early Childhood Center, 724-226-2400, Ext. 1600.

The Pre-K Counts and Highlands School District policies are designed so that you and your child can have an enjoyable and safe experience.



## NON-DISCRIMINATION / INCLUSION STATEMENT

The Highlands School District is an equal opportunity education institution. It will not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability,/or handicap, age, in its required admissions procedures, educational programs, services, activities, or employment practices, as required by Title VI, Title IX, and Section 504, and/or any applicable federal statute.

The Highlands School District will assist students who have Limited English Proficiency to participate in all programs, services, and activities.

The Highlands School District Pre-K Counts program recognizes

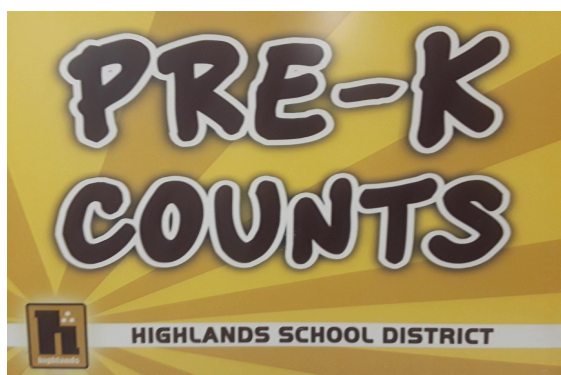
- The need to **support a culture of inclusion**, one that is very open and accepting, and one where all children and families feel welcome and included
- The need to ensure our **staff** from early childhood and early intervention programs **have the knowledge and competencies to support inclusion**
- that everyone has an inclusive attitude, that inclusion is **something that should be done for all children**

## **HISTORY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRE-K COUNTS PROGRAMMING**

The Pre-K Counts program is a state-funded grant written by OCDEL (Office of Child Development of Early Learning). OCDEL was founded in 2007 when it was enacted into Law by Act 45. The goal of OCDEL and the grant is to create opportunities for the Commonwealth's youngest at-risk children to develop and learn to their fullest potential. Pre-K providers must apply for the funding and be accepted.

Research on brain development and young children's learning confirms that all children can tap into their innate potential when they receive high-quality instruction. Early childhood education is a proven strategy that ensures a child's readiness for school and educational success. The state of Pennsylvania is committed to ensuring that all children begin school ready to learn and to become lifelong learners.

Early childhood education through the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program can open the doors of opportunity for every child to do well in school, in the workforce, and life.



## **HISTORY OF HIGHLANDS PRE-K COUNTS PROGRAMMING**

The Highlands Pre-K Counts program started in 2007. Previously, Highlands School District also had a district-funded half-day program called K-4. In 2011, K-4 was eliminated, and Highlands had two half-day Pre-K Counts classes. In 2018, OCDEL awarded Highlands additional funding to increase our Pre-K Counts classrooms. Today, the program is located at Highlands Early Childhood Center, and includes three full-day classrooms that serve a maximum of fifty-one children.

## **PRE-K COUNTS MISSION & PROGRAM GOALS**

The Pre-K Program's mission is to provide high-quality, comprehensive education to all enrolled Pre-K Counts children. By forming a partnership with parents, staff, and community members, we can offer services designed to promote a healthy, safe environment in which children, families, and staff can thrive and reach their full potential.

Goals:

### **Positive Self-Esteem**

- Respecting children and families with communication and acceptance
- Encouraging and welcoming families to engage with the program
- Assisting families in obtaining community resources and information
- Assisting families with Kindergarten readiness and transition

### **School Readiness**

- Developing the whole child
- Aligning curriculum with Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards
- Incorporating individual learning strategies for student success
- Encouraging curiosity and imagination within the classroom environment

### **Future School and Life Success**

- Providing strong role models
- Assisting parents as advocates for their child
- Providing positive classroom environments

## **GRANT AND DISTRICT REQUIREMENTS**

The Pre-K Counts grant contains required guidelines, including income levels, curriculum quality, staff credentials, attendance policies, instructional materials, and program operation procedures. In addition to grant requirements, the program provider may have additional guidelines. The Highlands Pre-K Counts program has the following additional requirements:

- Parents/guardians must provide accurate information upon registering.
- Pre-K students will follow the Highlands School District Attendance Policy.

## PRE-K COUNTS CURRICULUM

In addition to managing the Pre-K Counts grant process, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) also approves the use of appropriate, high-quality curriculum.

The Highlands Pre-K program uses The Frogstreet Curriculum as its educational platform. The Frogstreet program emphasizes language arts, math, social studies, science, social skills, music, art, and physical education. Our program also incorporates Heggerty to address phonemic awareness. The Second Step Social and Empathy Skills Program, which helps children develop socially and emotionally, is also included. It teaches strategies for getting along with others in daily life, as well as managing emotions and feelings.

These programs of study are aligned with the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards (Infant-2<sup>nd</sup> grade) and the Pennsylvania CORE Standards. They provide the foundation of information for what children should know and be able to do. This foundation is established upon a continuum that extends to high school.

## ENROLLMENT

The following criteria of income and age are required for enrollment in the Highlands Pre-K Counts program:

Total annual household income may not exceed the following 2025 Federal Income Guidelines.

Family Size	Pre-K Counts Eligible (300%)
1	\$46,950
2	\$63,450
3	\$79,950
4	\$96,450
5	\$112,950
6	\$129,450
7	\$145,950
8	\$162,450

Each Additional	+\$16,500 for each additional family member
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The child must be three or four years old by September 1<sup>st</sup>. Four-year-old children are given precedence through the use of our prioritization strategy process. Once all documentation is received, families will be notified of enrollment in June.

COMPLETE enrollment packet includes: [Pre-K application](#), proof of age, student immunization records, income verification or Zero Income Letter (if applicable).

If a child has an IEP/IFSP already in place, a copy of the IEP should be provided at the time of enrollment.

## ATTENDANCE

Pre-K Counts students are expected to attend school each day. Our program is 5 days a week and **follows the district calendar**.

**Student attendance is MANDATORY to participate in this program.** Attendance is taken upon arrival. We ask that you provide an excuse if your child will not be attending that particular day. As a state-regulated program, we are required to report attendance on an ongoing basis. We understand that sometimes your child may be ill, but we ask that you commit to the following:

- Your child’s arrival and departure are punctual.
- Schedule doctor appointments before or after school. If you have an appointment during school hours, please provide a doctor’s excuse.
- When an absence occurs, provide an excuse upon return, including the date and reason for absence. You may email an excuse to [HECCAttendance@goldenrams.com](mailto:HECCAttendance@goldenrams.com).
- Follow the [Highlands School District Attendance Policy](#).
- If you plan a vacation or have a family situation, you must complete the [Educational Tour or Trip form](#) one week before the absence for principal approval. Not all requests will be honored.

Examples of excused absences include: illness, accidents, death in the family, religious reasons, or impassable roads.

Illnesses that may keep your child home from school include: persistent cough or difficulty breathing, vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, unusual skin eruptions or rashes, redness and/or drainage from the eyes (pink eye), or a fever (100.4 degrees or higher). The student’s temperature should remain normal for 24 hours after a fever, free of medication, before returning to school.

If your child reaches ten unexcused absences, we will make every effort to collaborate with the family and aid in attendance improvement while helping to remove any barriers. Continued truancy may result in removal from the program.



## DAILY SCHEDULE

Our program is now a **full day**. The school day begins at **8:55 a.m.** and ends at **3:25 p.m.**

A consistent routine is essential in developing school readiness habits to benefit the child's educational foundation fully. Our typical schedule includes:

Arrival  
Breakfast/Lunch  
Morning Message / Calendar  
Special  
Guided Instruction (Lesson)  
Small Group Time (Centers)  
Choice Time (Play and Discovery)  
Gross Motor Time (Physical Education)  
Dismissal

## SCHOOL HEALTH

Health services are an essential part of our school system. During school hours, health services will include first aid, administration of medications, notification of parents in cases of illness or injury, mandated health screenings, maintenance of health records, and provision of health education and/or information.

### **Illness or Injury During School**

Students who become ill or injured during school hours will be sent to the nurse's office. The nurse will evaluate the student and provide care according to the Highlands School District Health Procedures. The parent/guardian will be contacted if the condition requires outside medical attention or the student must be sent home.

## **Immunizations**

Federal, state, and local guidelines require that children be properly immunized and have periodic physical examinations. Children in Pre-K Counts programs must have a current health assessment form on file within 45 days of enrollment. If your child is diagnosed with a disability, they must have a health assessment on file before starting our Pre-K Counts program. Parents/Guardians will be given a health assessment form for the child's physician to complete. Immunization records must be provided with a full health assessment and history.

## **Hand Washing**

Parents, children, and staff are encouraged to wash their hands upon arrival at school each day. This is an essential step in helping to reduce the spread of germs and illness in our program. They should wash the front and back of their hands, as well as between their fingers. Hands should also be washed before meal times, after using the restroom, if they cough or sneeze into their hands, and if they put their fingers in their mouth.

## **Personal Hygiene/Illness Prevention**

Good hygiene practices should be modeled and followed by parents, children, and staff. Universal precautions are observed in all Pre-K Counts classrooms. If your child has soiled clothes, they will be sent home in a bag. Toys and materials are cleaned regularly to prevent the spread of germs. These practices are based on prevention guidelines provided by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

## **Nutrition**

The Pre-K Counts program offers breakfast and lunch to all enrolled students at no cost. All meals meet the nutritional guidelines established by the United States Department of Agriculture. If a child has a food allergy and/or sensitivity, you must provide that information in writing so that we have it on file. Students are permitted to bring their food for either meal time. We encourage nutritious foods and request that you refrain from sending soda and candy.

## **SAFETY**

All school building doors are locked for student and staff safety and security. Highlands schools have implemented the Raptor Identification System, located in each school office. All visitors are required to report to the school office upon entering the building and must provide a valid driver's license or other government-issued identification. School personnel will run the card through the Raptor System. Approved visitors will be given a temporary badge and will be able to proceed into the school. Individuals who need to drop off or pick up materials in the school vestibule will not have to use the Raptor System. If you are picking up or dropping off your child, you will remain in the vestibule. School employees are required to enforce these regulations.

## **Drills**

Every month, each school in the Highlands School District will conduct a drill. During a fire or evacuation drill, all staff and students will be evacuated from the building and remain at a safe distance until all students and staff are accounted for. In addition to fire drills, severe weather, evacuation, and lockdown drills are conducted.

### **Weather/Emergency Information**

Sometimes it is necessary to delay starting times, cancel school, or dismiss students early due to weather or emergencies. The decision is based solely on the safety and welfare of students and staff. If you are not generally in the home when these scenarios may occur, you should make arrangements at the start of the school year to ensure that your child is safe and supervised. The following policies are in place for these situations:

1. Announcement of school emergencies, delays, and early dismissals will be communicated by the School Messenger automated phone system, the district's mobile app, Facebook, Twitter, our district website [www.goldenrams.com](http://www.goldenrams.com), and local radio and television stations.
2. Early dismissals will only be implemented when necessary.
3. During a two-hour delay, bus arrivals and school start time will be adjusted.
4. **PLEASE DO NOT CALL THE SCHOOL DURING THESE SITUATIONS.** Additional information during an emergency will be broadcast if necessary.

**\*Please note that the effectiveness of the School Messenger automated phone system depends on accurate contact information that you provide to the school. If your information changes during the school year, you must notify your school at 724-226-2400, Ext. 1600.**

### **Releasing Your Child**

If you bring your child to school late or pick them up early, you will have to sign your child in and/or out. A student will be released only to the parent/guardian or person designated on the emergency form. The person authorized to pick up must be at least 18 years old. A valid picture ID must be presented to ensure the safety and security of our students.

### **Child Abuse**

All school employees are mandated reporters. They have been trained in procedures for reporting abuse and neglect and are required by law to report. Whenever there is a reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, school personnel are required to report these cases to county and state agencies. These agencies have the legal right to interview students at school without parental consent.

### **Custody and Protection from Abuse Orders**

It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to notify the school principal and teacher of the circumstances regarding custody of a child and to provide proper legal documentation. The following policies are in place regarding custody and legal matters:

- When a court establishes custody, the school-parent relationship will be maintained consistent with the decision of the court.
- When custody is not formally established, the school will presume the parent with whom the child resides is responsible for reports, excuse forms, and authorization of any deviation from the routine transportation arrangements for the child. The non-custodial parent/guardian may receive progress reports and/or review the child's permanent record by contacting the building principal.
- If a parent/guardian has legal custody, they have the right for the child to be released to them, unless written documentation is provided that they are not authorized to do so.

### **Confidentiality and Release of Information**

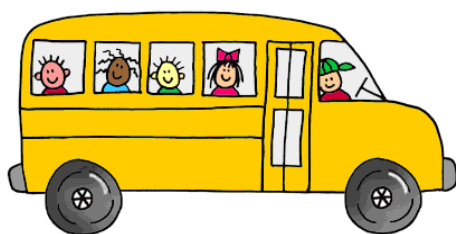
Student information, medical and academic records are only shared with school district personnel directly involved with the child's education. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of April 2003 prevents medical offices from sending forms and medical information to the school. It is the parents' responsibility to provide information to the school.

Due to current federal privacy laws, parents have discretion and responsibility to share medical information with their child's teacher, and/or the bus driver. School personnel are not permitted to release information without the written consent of the parent.

### **Media Procedure**

The Highlands School District will allow a student's image, verbal, or written comments, and school work to appear in various multimedia outlets, including newspaper features, television and radio broadcasts, district newsletters, publications, promotional videos, the district's website, and official district social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) unless the student's parent/guardian submits written objection. At no time will the district ever display personal information such as full address, phone number, and/or any confidential information.

**A parent/guardian may object to the use of their child's image, comments, or work appearing in any form of media by informing the child's principal in writing within the first 30 days of the school year. If a written objection is not received, silence will serve as implied consent. If you have any questions, please contact Communications Coordinator, Jennifer Goldberg, at 724-226-2400, Ext. 5640.**



## SCREENING AND ASSESSMENTS

### Developmental Screenings

The Pre-K Counts grant requires screening within the first 45 days of school. The Ages and Stages Questionnaires are the tools used to gather this developmental information. If a child demonstrates delays in any area, the Pre-K teacher will contact the early intervention agency through the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. The Early Intervention Program provides support to students in the Pre-K Counts classroom. The program will further evaluate the child and determine whether they qualify for additional support services.

At the end of the year, Pre-K Counts children will be screened for Kindergarten readiness by the Pre-K teacher and a Highlands School District representative. Screening results will be shared with parents to identify the child's strengths and areas of need. Our Pre-K Counts program works with the Kindergarten program to provide a smooth transition for students and parents/guardians.



### Assessments

Pre-K Counts students are assessed daily through observation, student work, review, and performance. In addition, teachers assess quarterly through the AIM Observational Tool. The Pre-K Counts grant also requires assessment results to be shared with families. This will be communicated quarterly and during parent-teacher conferences held in November. In addition, a Highlands Pre-K Counts report card will be shared every 9 weeks. These assessment tools provide information about skill progress regarding the following skills: social, emotional, work habits, motor, communication, and academic performance.

You will have an opportunity to meet with your child's Pre-K Counts teacher in November at parent/teacher conferences to discuss your child's development and performance. Parents can also discuss setting goals and plans to help ensure success in school. Parents/guardians should make every effort to attend these conferences. Working closely with your child's teacher will help build a positive relationship that will benefit your child's education.

## **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT**

### **Positive Behavior Interventions and Support Program (PBIS)**

Highlands School District uses the PBIS program. Our goal is to help your child develop self-discipline, enabling them to make good choices that result in appropriate behavior. This program includes:

- Establishing clear expectations that encourage respect for self, others, and the environment
- Providing positive role models
- Teaching advocacy techniques to set personal limits and boundaries
- Using positive reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior
- Supporting families to have consistency between home and school

Should a child's behavior require more intensive support, it is essential that stakeholders collaborate. The following supports will take place to avoid suspension or expulsion from the program:

- Open communication between school and family. The Pre-K Counts teacher will contact parents if a pattern of inappropriate behavior or a severe instance of inappropriate behavior occurs.
- If inappropriate behavior continues, a team meeting will be held that may include the parent, classroom teacher, and school principal to develop a positive behavior plan.
- Referral procedures will be made through Preschool Early Intervention (Allegheny Intermediate Unit) or Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) for additional support.
- Continual and timely review of behavior plans and behavior data with all stakeholders

### **Classroom Expectations**

All classroom teachers receive professional development opportunities throughout the year, which support a safe, nurturing, and enriching early childhood learning environment. Each classroom develops expectations that align with our PBIS framework. The teacher will share these expectations with you and your child. We encourage you to discuss these expectations as a family.

## PARENT COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

### Communication

An essential part of the child's learning experience is parental involvement with our program. Understanding the program and cooperating with its policies are essential to your child's experience and the smooth operation of the program.

All students will receive a take-home folder. Every attempt should be made to review the information nightly, including your child's school work. Please return the folder each morning.

If you have a concern or questions, please contact your child's teacher. If the issue is not resolved, bring your concerns to the appropriate staff or principal. Staff may be contacted via phone or email. Contact information can be found on the district website.

Parents will be asked to complete a Highlands Pre-K Counts Survey at the end of the year. Your feedback is essential in helping us to provide the most effective experience for the preschool-aged children in this community.

### Volunteering

Volunteers for classroom parties/events and field trips must have criminal, child abuse, and FBI clearances. Information about how to obtain these documents is available on the Highlands School District website at [www.goldenrams.com/volunteer](http://www.goldenrams.com/volunteer).

Parents/guardians who cannot physically volunteer are encouraged to remain involved with our program. Share your talents, culture, and interests. Working with your child at home is another excellent way that you can stay engaged with our program.



### PRE-K COUNTS PARENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Welcomed into the program
- Treated as a partner in my child's education
- Informed about my child's progress regularly

- Learn about the operation of the program.
- Expect support for my child to grow and develop.
- Volunteer and get involved with the program.
- Accept Pre-K Counts as an opportunity that can improve my child's life.
- Learn as much as possible about the Pre-K Counts program.
- Cooperate with the staff and other parents.
- Embrace the opportunities that will help my child be successful.
- Provide loving and protective guidance for my child.
- Promote and educate others about the program.
- Work with my child on skills and program activities.
- Attend and get involved in program opportunities and activities.

# Pre-K Counts Family Handbook Signature Page

**Please sign and return this page to your child's teacher.**

I have read the information and agree to support the policies within the Highlands Pre-K Counts Family Handbook. I have clarified any questions through the classroom teacher or the building principal.

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Printed Child's Name

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Printed Parent/Guardian Name

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Parent/Guardian Signature

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Date

**\*School Copy. Please sign and return this to your child's teacher.**