

PK

Guidebook

2025 - 2026



Marion P. Thomas
CHARTER SCHOOL

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Marion P. Thomas Mission

The Mission of Marion P. Thomas Charter School is to build culturally rich, transformative educational spaces that cultivate successful, lifelong innovators who use their passions, character, and intellect to better themselves, the greater Newark community, and the world beyond.

Motto

"It Takes a Village to Raise a Child!"

Core Values and Beliefs

The MPTCS Crest represents the core values and beliefs of the MPTCS Village:

The Sankofa Bird is based on a mythical bird with its feet firmly planted forward and its head turned backward. This West African symbol, which means to "go back and get it," was selected because it represents the belief the past serves as a guide for planning the future. At MPTCS, we are teaching our scholars to use knowledge from the past to inform, inspire, build a successful future, and give back to the community.

The Tree of Knowledge symbolizes lifelong learning that is rooted in rich culture and well-rounded experiences. Just as the branches of a tree strengthen and grow upwards to the sky, our scholars will grow stronger, striving for greater knowledge and new experiences, as they move through life. The roots represent a connection to our families, culture and communities, and the outline of the book demonstrates our quest to impart knowledge and develop lifelong learners and innovators.

The Torch represents the igniting of fire, passion, and leadership in our scholars. Our goal is to develop trailblazers who light their own paths.

The Tiger encased in the heart signifies balancing of strength, boldness, resilience, and prowess with compassion and strong character. MPTCS scholars will become good people who are courageous and self-aware.

The Village banner proclaims that we are a Village comprised of students, staff, parents, board members, community, and corporate partners who operate by our motto "It takes a village to raise a child," and 1999's the year MPTCS was founded.

Pre-Kindergarten at Marion P. Thomas Charter School

Our Purpose

At Marion P. Thomas Charter School, our vision is to cultivate a high-quality prekindergarten program that nurtures the academic, social-emotional, and developmental growth of all three- and four-year-old children. We are committed to providing a culturally responsive, inclusive, and joyful learning environment that prepares our youngest scholars for success in the K-12 setting, in life, and in future careers.

At MPTCS, we will:

- **Ensure a Safe and Nurturing Environment:** Provide a supportive, safe, and encouraging space where children learn through hands-on exploration, purposeful play, and developmentally appropriate experiences that foster a lifelong love of learning.
- **Promote Holistic Development:** Offer rich, engaging opportunities that build creativity, strengthen problem-solving abilities, foster independence, and support the development of positive self-esteem and responsible decision-making.
- **Promote Holistic Development:** Offer rich, engaging opportunities that build creativity, strengthen problem-solving abilities, foster independence, and support the development of positive self-esteem and responsible decision-making.
- **Build Strong Academic and Social-Emotional Foundations:** Design meaningful learning experiences that promote cognitive growth, language and literacy development, and emotional resilience.
- **Celebrate Diversity and Inclusion:** Promote acceptance, equity, and understanding by honoring the unique identities and cultural backgrounds of every child, including dual language learners and those with diverse abilities.
- **Engage Families and Community Partners:** Foster strong partnerships with families and community stakeholders to collaboratively assess needs and support each child's development.
- **Invest in Professional Excellence:** Provide ongoing, high-quality professional development to empower early childhood educators and support staff in delivering exceptional care and instruction to our youngest learners.

Through these commitments, MPTCS will ensure that all prekindergarten children enter kindergarten ready to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, with curiosity, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

Marion P. Thomas Charter School Preschool Principles

- **High-Quality Learning Environment:** A supportive preschool environment is essential for nurturing children's critical thinking, fostering appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism, and inspiring enthusiasm and engagement, the foundations of effective learning approaches. This environment encourages children to deeply engage in both individual and collaborative activities and projects. It is shaped by intentional interactions with thoughtfully designed indoor and outdoor spaces that offer opportunities for children to set goals, persist in their efforts, and acquire new knowledge and skills through purposeful play. Carefully planned instruction, age-appropriate materials, inviting furnishings, and consistent daily routines are complemented by a rich web of interpersonal relationships, between adults and children, adults with adults, and children with peers. Within this setting, each child's optimal development across all domains, language, social, physical, cognitive, and social-emotional, is supported, nurtured, extended, and enriched.
- **Social-Emotional Development:** Young children's social-emotional growth is deeply intertwined with their interactions with others and closely linked to their physical and cognitive development. Positive relationships with adults and peers within the preschool setting profoundly influence social-emotional learning. At MPTCS, we require dedicated, qualified teaching staff who work collaboratively with families to intentionally support children's development of social competence, self-confidence, and emotional resilience (NJ Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, 2014).
- **Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP):** Meaningful cognitive learning occurs when teachers facilitate purposeful, challenging play by introducing materials and activities that match each child's developmental readiness and interests (Steffen Saifer).

- **Productive Struggle:** Deep understanding arises from critical thinking and thoughtful dialogue, which are fostered through “productive struggle.” This involves providing children with opportunities to wrestle with complex ideas and tasks, encouraging effortful learning without allowing frustration to undermine confidence or motivation.

New Jersey State Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards

These standards are rooted in a robust theoretical framework designed to ensure the delivery of high-quality educational experiences for young children. The [Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards](#) document:

- Defines what constitutes supportive and enriching environments for preschool children.
- Provides clear guidance on the assessment of young children’s development and learning.
- Articulates the essential relationships among families, communities, and preschool programs.
- Identifies expected learning outcomes across developmental domains and outlines developmentally appropriate teaching practices that effectively support these outcomes.

New Jersey’s Early Learning Paths

[New Jersey’s Early Learning Paths](#) outline developmental standards for children from birth through 60 months (or five years of age). These standards provide a framework of developmental milestones that offer detailed insights into each domain and its components, as further described in the individual standard documents.

The *Early Learning Paths* are primarily aligned with the domains established in the *Birth to Three Early Learning Standards*, which include:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Language Development and Communication
- Cognitive Development
- Physical and Motor Development

This alignment ensures a comprehensive and cohesive approach to early childhood development across the critical early years.

Goals of the Prekindergarten Program

Our Prekindergarten program offers a rich, engaging learning environment grounded in developmentally appropriate practices. At the core of our approach is *The Creative Curriculum*® by Teaching Strategies, a comprehensive, research-based curriculum that supports the whole child across all domains of development. In alignment with this curriculum, we also incorporate guidance from the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards* provided by the New Jersey Department of Education. These standards serve as the foundation for our preschool learning expectations, ensuring that our instruction is both intentional and aligned with best practices in early childhood education.

The New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards focus on the following areas of development:

Developmental Area	Standard(s)	Description
Social-Emotional Development	0.1-0.5	Children demonstrate self-confidence; self-direction; can identify and express feelings; exhibit positive interactions with other children and adults; and they exhibit pro-social behaviors
Visual & Performing Arts	1.1-1.4	Children express themselves through developing an appreciation of: creative movement and dance, music, dramatic play and storytelling, the visual arts (painting, sculpting, drawing, etc.)
Health, Safety and Physical Education	2.1-2.4	Children develop self-help and hygiene skills, the knowledge and skills necessary to make nutritious food choices, the ability to be aware of potential hazards in their environment and they become competent and confident in activities that require gross and fine motor skills.
English Language Arts	RL.PK.1-10; RI.PK.1-10; RF.PK.1-4; W.PK.1-9; SL.PK.1-6; L.PK.1-6	Children are exposed to a variety of literacy-based text writing, speaking and listening and language.
Approaches to Learning	9.1-9.4	Children demonstrate initiative, engagement, and persistence; show creativity and imagination; identify and solve problems; and they apply what they have learned to new situations.
Mathematics	4.1-4.4	Children begin to demonstrate an understanding of numbers and counting; an initial understanding of numerical operations; conceptualize measurable attributes of objects and how to measure them; and to develop spatial and geometric sense.
Science	5.1-5.5	Children develop inquiry skills; observe and investigate matter and energy; observe and investigate living things; observe and investigate the Earth; and gain experience in using technology.
Social Studies	6.1-6.4	Children identify unique characteristics of themselves, their families, and others; become contributing members of the classroom community; demonstrate knowledge of neighborhood and community; and they demonstrate an awareness of the cultures within their classroom and community.
World Languages	7.1	Children know that people use different languages (including sign language) to communicate, and will express simple greetings, words, and phrases in a language other than their own.
Technology	8.1-8.5	Children will navigate simple on screen menus; use electronic devices independently; begin to use electronic devices to communicate; use common technology vocabulary; and begin to use electronic devices to gain information.

Transitioning into PreKindergarten

Starting Prekindergarten is an exciting milestone, but it can also feel overwhelming, for both children and families. Whether it's the first day of school or a return after a long break, transitions require patience, preparation, and strong collaboration between families and classroom staff. By working together, we can help children feel confident, safe, and ready to embrace their new environment.

Below are some helpful strategies for easing the transition to Prekindergarten:

1. **Talk it Out:** From the very first day, create a warm, welcoming classroom that feels physically and culturally safe. Help children understand what to expect in simple, reassuring language: "You'll be in the classroom with your teachers and new friends. Your family will come back to pick you up after a little while." Build excitement by sharing the fun aspects of preschool, new playmates, engaging activities, and tasty snacks!
2. **Social Prep Work:** While skills like sharing, taking turns, and cooperating aren't required before preschool, they certainly help. If a child hasn't had many chances to interact with peers, model and practice social-emotional skills using resources such as **The Pyramid Model**, which supports self-regulation, problem solving, and positive behavior strategies.
3. **Help Yourself:** Promote independence by allowing children to practice self-help skills like dressing, feeding, and cleaning up, even if the results aren't perfect. Teachers can support children in mastering toileting routines and offer positive reinforcement along the way.
4. **Read All About It:** Books can be a powerful tool in helping children make sense of new experiences. Storybook characters facing similar challenges can ease anxiety and foster understanding. **Reading stories together can spark conversations and help children feel more prepared.**

Recommended titles include:

- *Time for School, Mouse!* by Laura Numeroff
 - *Spot Loves School* by Eric Hill
 - *D.W.'s Guide to Preschool* by Marc Brown
 - *Corduroy Goes to School* by Don Freeman
5. **Getting to Know You:** Create intentional spaces in your classroom that celebrate each individual, both children and adults. Feature family photos, student artwork, or "About Me" displays to help everyone learn names, interests, and build early connections. This helps foster a strong sense of belonging from day one.

6. **Goodbye for Now:** Saying goodbye can be one of the toughest parts of the transition. Encourage families to come up with a special goodbye ritual, such as a secret handshake, a goodbye rhyme, or a family photo their child can keep in a special spot in the classroom. These comfort strategies provide reassurance and help ease separation anxiety.
7. **No Turning Back:** If a child becomes upset at drop-off, it's natural for families to want to stay or intervene, but this can prolong the difficulty. Gently reassure caregivers that while it's hard to walk away when a child is crying, staying too long or returning repeatedly can increase anxiety and undermine the child's confidence. Offer empathy and explain that with consistent routines and loving support, children learn they are safe and capable in their new environment.

What Does Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) Mean?

In our high-quality, state-funded preschool programs, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a foundational framework that ensures all children, regardless of background, ability, or prior experience, are engaged in joyful, meaningful learning that matches their individual needs and developmental levels. Preschool children thrive when they experience consistent, caring relationships with adults and peers, are guided by intentional and responsive teaching, and have daily opportunities to explore a well-planned, engaging environment that promotes discovery, creativity, and independence.

Children enter preschool with unique strengths, challenges, and prior experiences. One child may already recognize letters and numbers but needs help with sharing and group play. Another may be confident socially but still be developing foundational literacy skills. A developmentally appropriate classroom does not expect all children to learn the same thing in the same way at the same time.

DAP respects the whole child, socially, emotionally, cognitively, linguistically, and physically, and supports a learning process that is as important as the outcome.

MPTCS follows this approach in alignment with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards.

As early childhood expert Steffen Saifer reminds us, "Children learn best while engaged in meaningful and challenging play that is facilitated by professional educators."

What Does DAP Look Like in Practice?

★ **Integrated Learning Throughout the Day**

Subjects and skills are not taught in isolation, they are embedded in daily routines and play. For example, math emerges naturally while children count blocks, sort materials, or serve food during family-style dining.

★ **Active, Hands-On Experiences**

Children learn by doing. They construct knowledge through exploration, conversation, trial and error, and reflection, rather than passive instruction.

★ **Balanced Instructional Approaches**

Teachers offer a blend of child-initiated play and teacher-guided small group activities, ensuring that children make choices and exercise agency while also receiving targeted support.

★ **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practice**

Teachers intentionally include materials, books, and routines that reflect children’s home languages and cultural backgrounds, supporting identity development and inclusion.

★ **Choice and Independence**

Children are encouraged to make decisions about where to “work,” helping them develop independence, focus, and self-regulation.

★ **Responsive, Supportive Interactions**

Teachers are attuned to signs of frustration or stress and use co-regulation and problem-solving strategies to guide children in navigating challenges.

★ **Fostering Community and Competence**

Classrooms emphasize collaboration, empathy, and mutual respect. Children learn not only how to do things but how to do them together.

Preschool Solution Toolkit

Developmentally Appropriate Strategies to Resolve Social Problems

Solution toolkits are essential resources that help young children begin to solve social and learning problems independently. These toolkits often use pictorial and textual cues to scaffold children’s thinking, encourage self-regulation, and build problem-solving skills in developmentally appropriate ways.

What is a "Solutions Toolkit"?

A **Solutions Toolkit** is a visual and language-rich support tool that:

- Offers **multiple strategies** children can use when faced with a problem.
- Uses **pictures and simple text** to make the strategies accessible to non-readers or emerging readers.
- Is often introduced, modeled, and practiced regularly by teachers before children are expected to use it independently.

Pictorial Cues

Visual supports are key in Pre-K. They help children recognize the strategy even if they cannot yet read. Typical pictorial cues might include:

Strategy	Picture Example
Take Turns	Two children with a timer or passing an object
Share	Two children holding the same toy or item
Ask for Help	A child raising a hand or talking to a teacher
Use a Timer	A visual sand timer or digital timer
Trade	Children swapping toys
Walk Away	A child calmly leaving the situation
Say How You Feel	A child with speech bubble showing “I’m sad” or “I’m mad”

Textual Cues

Textual cues are **simple, consistent phrases** that match each pictorial cue. They help children begin to associate language with actions and problem-solving steps. Examples include:

- “Let’s take turns.”
- “Can I use it when you’re done?”
- “I need help, please.”
- “Let’s use the timer.”
- “I feel sad when...”

Teachers read and model these phrases during play and conflicts so that children internalize and later use them.

An Evidence-Based Framework: The Pyramid Model

Red Tier: Intervention which is comprised of practices related to individualized intensive interventions.

Green Tier : Prevention which represents practices that are targeted social emotional strategies to prevent problems.

Blue Tier : Universal supports for all children through nurturing and responsive relationships and high quality environments.

Yellow Foundation: The foundation for all of the practices in the pyramid are the systems and policies necessary to ensure a workforce able to adopt and sustain these evidence-based practices.



At MPTCS, any adult who interacts with our Pre-Kindergartners is expected to use evidence-based practices to promote young children’s healthy social and emotional development. One of the core frameworks we implement is the Pyramid Model, a conceptual model developed by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL). This model offers a comprehensive array of strategies to prevent and address challenging behaviors while promoting the development and well-being of all children.

The Pyramid Model is rooted in Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and is specifically designed to support the social-emotional development and school readiness of children from birth to age five.

The Pyramid Model is organized into three tiers of support that align with children’s varying levels of need:

Tier 1: Universal Promotion (Support for All Children)

This foundational level ensures all children benefit from nurturing relationships, high-quality learning environments, and intentional teaching of social skills.

In practice at MPTCS:

- Adults model and teach behavior expectations and daily routines.
- Classrooms are designed to promote engagement and autonomy.
- Children learn to identify emotions, solve problems, and build friendships.
- Visual supports, feeling charts, and solution toolkits are embedded throughout the day.

Tier 2: Targeted Social-Emotional Supports (Support for Some Children)

Some children may need more focused teaching and support to develop key skills.

At MPTCS, this may include:

- Small group instruction on friendship skills, self-regulation, or problem-solving.
- Use of social stories, role-play, and puppets to model appropriate responses.
- Ongoing observation and documentation to monitor progress.

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention (Support for a Few Children)


For children who display persistent or significant challenges, individualized supports are created through collaboration with the **Preschool Intervention and Referral Team (PIRT)**. **This includes:**

- Developing a behavior support plan tailored to the child's developmental needs, communication style, and triggers.
- Partnering with families and specialists to ensure consistency across settings.
- Providing intentional, strength-based strategies and supports.

The Goal of the Pyramid Model Is To:

- Create an environment where every child feels valued and excited to come to school.
- Design spaces that foster active engagement and independence.
- Focus on teaching children what to do, rather than just correcting behavior.
 - This includes explicitly teaching expectations, routines, and replacement skills for challenging behavior.

By integrating the Pyramid Model with developmentally appropriate practice, we create a nurturing and responsive early learning environment that supports the whole child, socially, emotionally, and academically.

 For more information about the Pyramid Model and CSEFEL, visit: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>

Professional Development, Teacher Meetings, and Preparation

District Expectations for Pre-K Educators

(Aligned to the New Jersey Preschool Teaching & Learning Standards and Classroom Teaching Guidelines)

Purpose and Overview

High-quality early childhood instruction requires thoughtful planning, reflective practice, and collaborative professional learning. The following expectations support our shared goal of delivering developmentally appropriate, standards-aligned instruction to all preschool learners.

Professional development and collaborative preparation are anchored in:

- A focus on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)
- Shared use of data to inform instruction
- Reflective teamwork with instructional coaches and teaching assistants
- Intentional planning of curriculum and learning environments

Study Unpacks and Lesson Unpack Expectations and Prework

The purpose of unpacking a Study is to develop and deepen content knowledge and prepare to launch the upcoming Study with fidelity and developmental appropriateness.

- **Study Unpacks:** Study unpacks will occur at the district level in your specific grade-level band (3s/4s) at least two weeks prior to launching a new Study.

Pre-Work (To Bring or Complete):

- Read and annotate the Study's Unit Plan.
 - Review aligned *NJ Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards* and GOLD® priority objectives for both 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds.
 - Reflect on adaptations for diverse learners, including multilingual and special needs students.
 - Jot down discussion points or areas needing clarification (i.e., vocabulary, guiding questions, assessment ideas).
- **Lesson Unpacks:** Lesson unpacks will occur **weekly** at the school level with the teacher, teacher assistant, and Preschool Instructional Coach during shared planning time.

Pre-Work (To Bring or Complete):

- Draft next week's lesson plans based on the current unit and GOLD® data.
 - Identify embedded teaching strategies and opportunities for small group, large group, and individualized instruction.
 - Engage in the Lesson Unpack Protocol:
 - What are the objectives?
 - What is the teaching sequence?
 - What does this look like for diverse learners?
 - Be prepared to model or rehearse a critical component of a pre-selected lesson (e.g., dialogic reading, science inquiry, etc.).
- **Data Meetings:** Data meetings will occur weekly with your Preschool Instructional Coach during your facilitated IPP (coaching session).
Goal: Reflect on student progress and co-plan instructional next steps using authentic data.

Pre-Work (To Bring or Complete):

- Student work samples (artifacts from learning centers, group activities, etc.)
- Recent TS GOLD® entries with documented observations and photos
- Reflections on children's interests, strengths, and areas for support
- Questions, wonderings, or requests for coaching support

Expectations:

- Data will be used to guide individual and group instruction planning.
- Discussions will focus on developmental growth across domains (cognitive, SEL, physical, language/literacy, math, and approaches to learning)
- Next steps will include small group grouping, instructional adjustments, and strategy-sharing.

Collaborative Reflection and Coaching Culture

All preschool educators (teachers, assistants, coaches) are expected to:

- Engage in reflective conversations that strengthen instructional decisions.
- Apply feedback from unpacks and data meetings into classroom practice.
- Celebrate student growth and refine instruction collaboratively.
- Use the NJDOE Preschool Guidelines and Standards as living tools in daily planning.

Intellectual Prep Protocol (IPP) for Lesson and Study and Lesson Plans

The Intellectual Prep Protocol (IPP) supports early childhood educators in thoughtfully preparing for instruction by internalizing lesson and Study plans, connecting instruction to children's developmental needs, and planning with intentionality. IPP ensures that teaching is grounded in child development theory, responsive to the interests and needs of young learners, and reflective of high-quality instructional practices.

IPP honors the core principles of DAP by supporting teachers in:

- Understanding what children are learning and why it matters
- Planning for hands-on, meaningful experiences
- Using data to individualize instruction and support growth across all domains

What is IPP?

There are two types of IPP used in Pre-K:

- Independent IPP: Teachers reflect and plan on their own, guided by lesson plans, GOLD data, and Study objectives.
- Facilitated IPP: Teachers collaborate with colleagues and the instructional coach to deepen understanding of child development, assess student progress, and practice lesson delivery.

IPP is not just a planning tool, it is a thinking routine that sharpens our practice and ensures learning experiences are intentional, rich, and responsive.

Weekly Planning Expectations

Educators will engage in the following developmentally appropriate planning cycle:

- Every Wednesday: Prepare for the Upcoming Week
- Create weekly lesson plans that align with current Study themes, GOLD objectives, and the interests/needs of the children.
- Use observations and documentation from the current week to plan for individualized support and small group experiences.
- Ensure lessons reflect:
 - A balance of child-initiated and teacher-guided experiences
 - Opportunities for exploration through play
 - Developmentally appropriate language, materials, and pacing

Annotating Lesson Plans Using IPP

Before each new week:

- Review the GOLD data and observational notes to identify what children know and are ready to learn next.
- Annotate each lesson by noting:
 - *Why this lesson matters* developmentally

- *Which children or groups* may need support, challenge, or modifications
- *What vocabulary or concepts* to highlight based on developmental needs
- *How learning goals connect* to the whole child (cognitive, SEL, language, etc.)

This ensures instruction is both intentional and responsive to individual children.

Reading & Internalizing Study Plans with the IPP Protocol

For each Study:

- Read the Study Unit Plan in advance (minimum 2 weeks before launch)
- Annotate using the IPP prompts:
- What are the big ideas of this Study?
- How do these ideas connect to children’s lived experiences?
- What materials, provocations, and play opportunities can support deeper engagement?
- How will I support language development and cultural responsiveness?

Focus on hands-on investigations, child voice, and opportunities for authentic exploration.

Observation Feedback Meetings

Ongoing Reflection to Support Instructional Growth in Pre-K

Observation Feedback Meetings are a vital part of our professional learning culture. These weekly conversations create space for reflection, support, and growth, helping teachers strengthen their implementation of developmentally appropriate practices, high-quality instruction, and effective use of our early childhood teacher taxonomies. Throughout the week, your Preschool Instructional Coach, school administrator, or program supervisor will observe teaching practices during real-time classroom interactions.

Observations focus on:

- Teacher-child interactions
- Use of developmentally appropriate materials
- Implementation of the daily schedule and routines
- Instructional strategies aligned to the current Study and GOLD objectives
- Responsive classroom management and supports for diverse learners
- Feedback will be provided in the moment when appropriate and documented for discussion during your scheduled weekly meeting.

Weekly Feedback Meetings

Each week, you will meet one-on-one with your Preschool Instructional Coach or Administrator to reflect on observations, receive targeted feedback, and co-plan next steps. These sessions are designed to be collaborative, supportive, and actionable.

Feedback Framework: SEE IT. NAME IT. PRACTICE IT.

Step	What it Looks Like
See It	What was the objective of the lesson or interaction? What was observed in practice?
Name It	Identify the gap: What's the difference between what occurred and the high-quality exemplar? What is one high-leverage move we can implement?
Practice It	Practice together: Plan, script, or model the strategy. Rehearse and refine until confident.

This cycle supports continuous improvement and deepens your instructional toolkit with every meeting.

Common Planning Periods

To support high-quality instruction and strong team collaboration, each Pre-K classroom will have a dedicated weekly common planning period for the lead teacher and assistant teacher. This protected time is designed for both team members to work together on planning, preparation, and reflection to improve classroom practices and student outcomes.

During this time, the teaching team may:

- Co-plan weekly themes and instruction based on Creative Curriculum, GOLD objectives, and student interests and needs.
- Turnkey key updates and data from coaching sessions, assessments, or professional learning opportunities.
- Prepare materials, organize learning centers, and align on roles for daily routines and instructional activities.

Although it's called "planning," this time is flexible and can include a variety of collaborative activities that support continuous improvement:

- Reviewing instructional plans: Reflect on and refine upcoming lesson plans, ensuring alignment to standards, developmental appropriateness, and student interests.
- Analyzing student work: Examine samples of student drawings, writing, or other artifacts to adjust strategies for scaffolding learning and promoting growth.
- Discussing classroom data: Review anecdotal notes, GOLD checkpoints, or observation data to identify trends and inform next steps for instruction or behavior supports.
- Sharing professional resources: Read and discuss articles, videos, or research that offer new ideas or strategies to enhance early learning environments.

- Problem-solving classroom challenges: Collaborate on behavior strategies, transitions, or classroom routines to increase consistency and reduce disruptions.

Impact on Instruction

These weekly planning periods promote:

- Improved coordination between teaching team members.
- Stronger instructional alignment across lessons and activities.
- Better understanding of student needs, leading to more targeted support.
- Professional growth through shared reflection, feedback, and idea exchange.

All teaching teams will follow the attached Common Planning Protocol to guide their weekly meetings and ensure the time is used intentionally and effectively.

The Creative Curriculum Overview

The philosophy of The Creative Curriculum® is that young children learn best by doing. The Creative Curriculum® is built on theories of development in young children, that all children learn through active exploration of their environment and therefore the environment plays a critical role in learning. The goal of the Creative Curriculum is to help children become independent, self-confident, inquisitive and enthusiastic learners by actively exploring their environment. The curriculum identifies goals in all areas of development: Social/Emotional, Cognitive, Physical and Language.

The planned activities for the children, the organization of the environment, the selection of toys and materials, planning the daily schedule and interacting with the children, are all designed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the curriculum and give your child a successful year in school. The Creative Curriculum® shows teachers how to integrate learning in literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology throughout the day. It also gives the teacher a wide range of teaching strategies-- from child-initiated learning to teacher-directed approaches-- to best respond to children's learning styles, strengths, and interests.

Parts of the Day

Creative Curriculum–Aligned Daily Routines & Experiences

Creative Curriculum	Revised Description (include in lesson plans & family handbooks)
Mighty Minutes® Transitions	Use a quick Mighty Minutes® song, chant, or movement game that lets children stop/go, echo language, and gesture. The brief, playful routine strengthens self-regulation and helps children shift smoothly to the next experience while practicing oral language and gross-motor skills.
“What’s in the Bag?” / Focus Activity	Just before Group Meeting (or another opening of the day), draw one object or picture from a cloth bag. Children ask yes/no questions, make predictions, and connect the item to the current Study or to concepts already explored. This supports attending, memory, vocabulary, and concept review in a highly social context.
Attention-Focusing Mighty Minutes®	Keep a short list of go-to fingerplays, chants, and call-and-response songs. Use them as signals to gather, re-focus, or transition. Pairing rhythm with movement nurtures phonological awareness, working memory, and group cohesion.
Group Meeting	<i>Creative Curriculum</i> outlines a consistent sequence: 1) Welcome song 2) Attendance & class jobs 3) Children share news 4) Question of the Day & modeled Daily Message (scaffolded writing) 5) Song/fingerplay 6) Brief Study-related discussion or demonstration 7) Preview of new interest-area materials & daily schedule
Dramatic Play Preview / Teacher Modeling	When a new prop box or scenario is introduced, gather the class to model roles, language, and problem-solving. Invite children to help decide where the materials belong and what characters they might portray. Schedule only when introducing fresh Study content or observing a need for enriched play scripts.
Choice-Time Planning	After reviewing the photo/word cards that label each Interest Area, children choose where to start. Use a simple planning board, name sticks, or picture cards (writing or drawing optional). Encourage children to articulate <i>what</i> they will do and <i>with whom</i> , then revisit those plans at cleanup for reflection.

**Choice Time –
Interest-Area Play**

Provide a minimum of one, preferably two, uninterrupted Choice-Time blocks (totaling at least 60 min). Children carry out their plans in any interest area, e.g., Dramatic Play, Blocks, Art, Discovery. Teachers circulate to extend language, embed Study-related math/science questions, and document observations.

**Outdoor Choice
Time**

Offer 40–60 min total outdoor exploration daily (divided if needed). Provide open-ended gross-motor equipment, study invitations (e.g., wind ribbons), and clipboard materials for sketching or note-taking outdoors .

**Whole-Group
Literacy
Experience**

Rotate between: Buddy Reading, Interactive Writing / Shared Writing, Choral Poems & Songs, or Graphics Practice (large-motor “sky-writing,” then small-motor boards). Select one focus per day to keep the experience active and brief.

**Intentional
Read-Aloud**

Follow the CC Read-Aloud sequence:

- Before Reading – engage background knowledge, set a purpose, preview rich vocabulary.
- During – model fluent reading, pause for open-ended questions & Think-Alouds.
- After – revisit the text’s big idea, invite children to respond or act it out.

**Intentional
Teaching Cards –
Math/Science
Small Groups**

Form two heterogeneous groups. Select one Intentional Teaching Card or Study investigation (e.g., *Making Collections, Attribute Game*). Rotate experiences every few weeks so children revisit concepts with increasing complexity.

**Intentional
Teaching Cards –
Language &
Literacy**

Parallel structure to above, focusing on phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and emergent writing (e.g., *Name Puzzles, Sound Sort*).

**Second
Choice-Time Block
(Optional)**

If the schedule allows a second indoor Choice-Time, frame it as an extension of morning explorations or as Project/Study Work Time. Teachers may invite small groups for follow-up investigations or family-style snack during this block.

**Closing Meeting /
Reflection**

Gather with a calming Mighty Minutes® activity. Children share a highlight, revisit the Question of the Day, add photos or notes to the class Study Wall, and preview tomorrow. End with a goodbye song and dismissal routines.

Arc of the Year (AoTY)

The **Arc of the Year (AoTY)** for Pre-K provides a developmentally appropriate roadmap that outlines the vision, strategy, and instructional priorities across the school year. Grounded in *The Creative Curriculum* and aligned with the New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards.

The AoTY provides:

1. **A Clear Vision for the Year**

A big-picture overview of how we support the whole child, socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively, through integrated, play-based learning.

2. **Intentional Planning and Pacing**

Guidance on how to introduce and deepen children's learning across core content areas and Study topics, ensuring alignment to GOLD® objectives and developmentally appropriate expectations.

3. **Support for Effective Teaching**

Resources and tools to help teachers plan, implement, and reflect on meaningful learning experiences, responsive interactions, and individualized instruction.

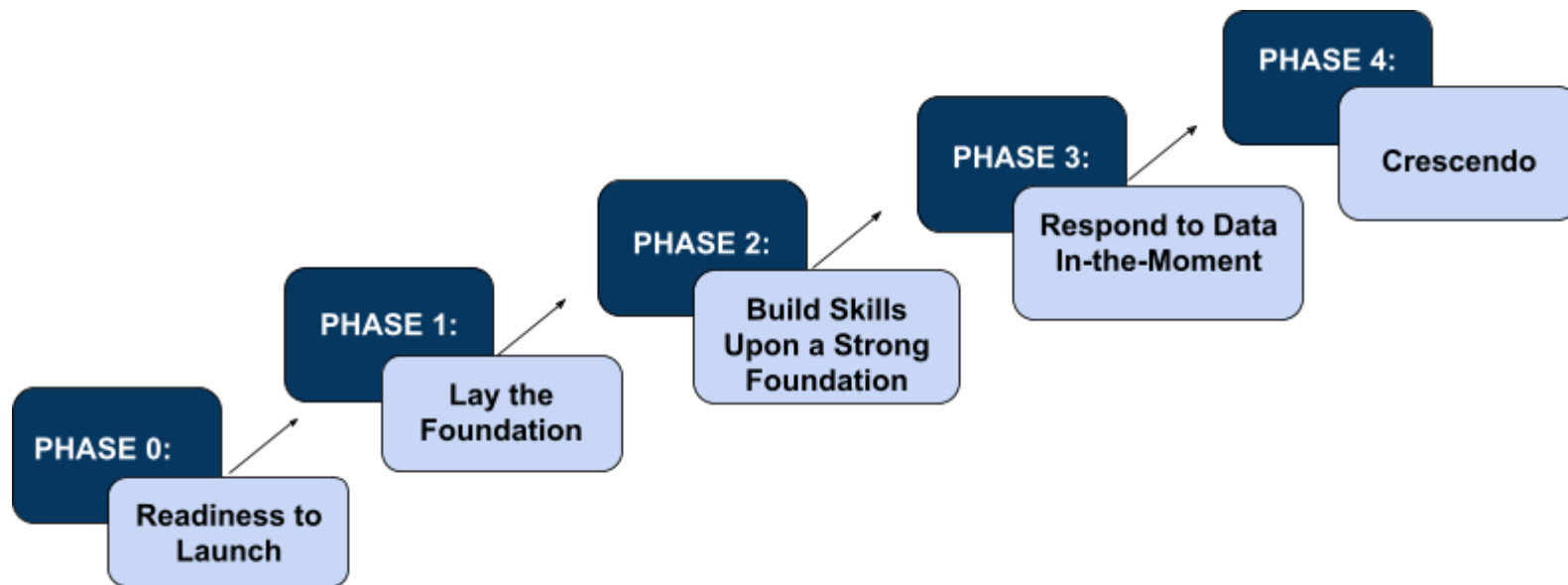
4. **Consistency Across Classrooms**

A common framework that promotes coherence, equity, and shared language across all Pre-K classrooms within our network.

5. **Family Engagement Touchpoints**

Opportunities throughout the year to partner with families in supporting children's growth, development, and curiosity both at home and at school.

Ultimately, the Arc of the Year is our commitment to creating a strong, intentional foundation that prepares each child for success in kindergarten and beyond, while honoring the unique pace and wonder of early childhood.



Pre-Kindergarten Arcs of the Year-- Creative Curriculum® Road-Map

The Arc of the Year is a strategic guide for teaching, learning, and classroom quality throughout the school year. Each Arc outlines key priorities for instruction, environment, and developmental goals, aligned to:

- Creative Curriculum®: High-quality, play-based, and study-driven instruction
- ECERS-3: Environmental quality and teaching practices
- TPOT: Social-emotional teaching aligned to the Pyramid Model
- GOLD®: Ongoing formative assessment tracking progress toward kindergarten readiness, aligned with NJ Preschool Standards.

Goal	End-of-Year Target
Kindergarten Readiness	≥ 75 % of all PK-3 & PK-4 children meet or exceed the <i>GOLD</i> ® Priority Objectives
Classroom Quality	≥ 4.0 overall on the Spring ECERS-3 for 6 of 7 classrooms (4 of 5 PEA funded classrooms)
Social-Emotional Fidelity	≥ 75 % on TPOT Key Practices in every classroom

Arc 0 – Readiness to Launch

August – mid-September

Focus	Success Indicators
Environment & Routines <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Launch Beginning of the Year study (First Six Weeks)• Set up at least five well-defined Interest Areas with a Cozy/Privacy space• Post a pictorial Daily Schedule at children’s eye level• Introduce Mighty Minutes® and daily Group Meeting structures• Set up and teach expectations for Interest Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GOLD® Objectives 1a–c, 2c, 3a–b observed (self-regulation, routines, peer interactions)• ≥ 5 Interest Areas set up with labels/materials• Children begin using posted daily schedule independently Children follow routines; transition wait-time ≤ 3 min daily average
Relationships & Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement Pyramid Model Tier 1 practices: nurturing interactions, clear expectations, consistent routines.	TPOT Universal Practices evident in > 80 % of observations
Teacher Capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summer Institute: Creative Curriculum® foundations, GOLD® basics,• Staff trained in ECERS-3 essentials, TPOT overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 100 % staff attendance• 100% staff complete baseline ECERS/GOLD self-assessment

Arc 1 – Laying the Foundation

mid-September – November

Focus	Success Indicators
Study Launch & Community Building <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue Beginning of the Year study, transitioning into first seasonal or content study (e.g., Trees)	GOLD® Objectives 8a–b, 9a–b, 15a (Language comprehension, vocabulary, rhyming) emerging across whole-group and small-group settings

- Build oral language, vocabulary, and phonological awareness through Intentional Teaching Cards and interactive read-alouds
- Introduce family connections (home-language labels, family photos in environment)

- Large and Small Group Meeting sequence consistently implemented
- Daily Group Meeting follows full Creative Curriculum sequence (welcome song, daily message, study talk)

Language & Literacy

- Use Intentional Teaching Cards for interactive read-alouds, name recognition, phonological play.
- Label classroom in English + home languages.

- GOLD® Objectives 8a–b, 9a–b, 15a observed (language comprehension, vocabulary, rhyming)
- ECERS-3 Language & Literacy ≥ 4.0 by Nov checkpoint

Social-Emotional Skills

- Teach and display feelings vocabulary and problem-solving steps (solutions toolkit) in Dramatic Play

TPOT Social Competency items ≥ 70 %

Arc 2 – Building on a Strong Foundation

December – January

Focus

Success Indicators

Data-Driven Planning

- Analyze Fall GOLD® checkpoint
- Set group and individual targets
- Adjust small-group rosters and Intentional Teaching experiences accordingly

- Evidence of differentiated small-groups documented in lesson plans

Math & Science Investigations

- Introduce second Study (e.g., Buildings, Balls).
- Use Intentional Teaching Cards for counting, comparing, simple experiments.

- GOLD® Objectives 20a–c, 21a–c, 24 observed
- ECERS-3 Learning Activities ≥ 4.0

Family Partnership

- Hold mid-year family conferences use GOLD® data & child work samples.

- ≥ 95% family participation in conferences with GOLD® reports and documentation

-
- Share at-home strategies with families
-

Arc 3 – Respond & Extend

February – March

Focus

Vocabulary & Print-Rich Environment

- Launch third study (e.g., Clothes or Reduce, Reuse, Recycle)
- Add word walls, class-made books, dictation charts
- Model advanced vocabulary in play

Targeted SEL Supports

- Implement Pyramid Model Tier 2 strategies: scripted stories, visual supports, FLIP IT!

In-the-Moment Assessment

- Collect daily anecdotal notes
- Upload to GOLD® within 48 hours

Success Indicators

- GOLD® Objectives 17b, 18a–c observed (emergent writing, letter-sound connections)
- ECERS-3 Interactions “Encouraging Use of Books” ≥ 5

- TPOT Targeted Supports $\geq 70\%$ fidelity

- 100% of children included in Winter checkpoint submission
-

Arc 4 – Crescendo & Kindergarten Transition

March – June

Focus	Success Indicators
Culminating Study & Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Launch final study (e.g., <i>Insects, Recycling</i>)• Children co-plan and present class project with family showcase	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ≥ 75% of study-related GOLD® objectives demonstrated during showcase
Instructional Quality <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct Spring ECERS-3 and TPOT fidelity walks• Coach toward high-quality teaching strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ECERS-3 overall ≥ 4.2 in every classroom• TPOT Key Practices ≥ 75%
Kindergarten Readiness <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete GOLD® Spring checkpoint• Prepare transition summaries for families and kindergarten teachers• Host Step-Up to K workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ≥ 75% of cohort meets/exceeds GOLD® Priority Objectives• Transition plans shared with all families

How to Use This AoTY

1. **Plan** – Map weekly lesson plans to the focus points in the current Arc.
2. **Observe** – Gather evidence during Choice Time, small groups, and routines; upload to GOLD®.
3. **Reflect** – Use ECERS-3 and TPOT look-fors as self-check tools during IPP & coaching cycles.
4. **Adjust** – Re-group children, refresh Interest Areas, and select new Intentional Teaching Cards every Arc based on data.

This streamlined Arc of the Year keeps every classroom aligned to *The Creative Curriculum*®, state standards, and our network’s quality benchmarks, ensuring each child leaves Pre-K ready to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.

Creating a Positive Classroom Environment

In a high-quality early childhood classroom, the environment acts as the third teacher, intentionally designed to support exploration, independence, and discovery. A thoughtfully prepared space not only reflects the values and needs of the children, but also communicates that the classroom is a place where learning is visible, valued, and collaborative. In alignment with the New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, the following elements are essential for creating a classroom environment that nurtures whole-child development across all domains:

Organization of Classroom Materials and Space

1. Intentional Organization of Space and Materials

- The classroom includes at least five well-defined interest areas, such as Blocks, Dramatic Play, Library, Art, and Science/Discovery. Each center is labeled with words and pictures, and materials are stored on accessible, organized shelves to encourage self-direction and responsibility.
- Noisy centers (e.g., Blocks, Dramatic Play) are placed away from quiet centers (e.g., Library, Writing) to reduce distractions and support focused learning.
- A Cozy Area is available for children to relax and self-regulate. This space is calming, soft, and not used for active physical play.
- A Privacy Area is thoughtfully set up to allow children a retreat from group activity, promoting emotional self-care and autonomy.

2. Environment as a Reflective and Interactive Space

- Children's original work is displayed prominently and at eye level, celebrating their voice, effort, and ideas. Displays evolve throughout the year to reflect ongoing learning and children's interests.
- Visual documentation (e.g., photos, charts, class books) makes learning visible, encouraging children to revisit, reflect on, and extend their thinking.

3. Health, Safety, and Accessibility

- All materials labeled "**Keep out of reach of children**" are stored in **locked cabinets or drawers** to ensure safety at all times.
- Classroom furniture and materials are developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and arranged to allow independent movement and engagement for all learners, including those with disabilities.

4. Diversity, Discovery, and Play

- The Block Area includes multiple types of blocks and open-ended accessories in a large enough space for collaborative building. The Dramatic Play Area features rotating themes (e.g., family, community helpers, imaginative worlds) and includes diverse, inclusive props that reflect children's cultures and lived experiences.
- The Science and Discovery Area provides hands-on materials such as natural collections (e.g., shells, rocks), magnifying tools, nonfiction books, and living things (e.g., plants or classroom pets), promoting curiosity, observation, and questioning.

[See PK Classroom Checklist.](#)

Daily Schedule and Routines

The classroom environment, our “third teacher”, is intentionally structured so children can choose, explore, and practice emerging skills throughout the day. The guidelines below describe minimum standards for time allocation, material availability, and health & safety routines in a full-day (≈ 6 hour) Pre-K program.

1. Choice-Time / Interest-Areas

- **Minimum access:** Children have uninterrupted use of well-defined centers for at least one-third of the instructional day (≈ 2 hours).
Purpose: Promotes autonomy, intentional play, problem solving, and decision-making as children select materials, negotiate roles, and extend learning.

2. Gross-Motor Play

- **Daily requirement:** ≥ 45 minutes of active movement, ideally outdoors.
- **Weather permitting:** Outdoor play occurs unless there is active precipitation or a local advisory; wind-chill/heat index must be above 32 °F (0 °C) and within safe parameters.
- **Equipment:** A balance of portable (e.g., balls, hoops) and stationary (e.g., climbers) options supports varied skill levels. Families should send children dressed for outdoor conditions.

3. Group Times

Format	Typical Length	Maximum Length (by late spring)	Rationale
Whole Group	10–15 min	20 min	Builds community; introduces concepts briskly.
Small Group	10 min	15 min	Targets specific skills in manageable bursts.

4. Rest & Self-Regulation

- **Rest time:** ≈ 60 minutes daily, with quiet alternatives for children who do not sleep.
- **Cozy & Privacy Areas:** Always available for self-regulation outside scheduled rest.

5. Literacy-Rich Environment

- **Book collection:** At least three titles in each category, fantasy, realistic fiction, informational text, animal stories, science, cultural diversity, and books depicting varied abilities, distributed across centers.
- **Access:** Children may select and handle books throughout the day; teachers rotate titles tied to current studies and children's interests.

6. Sensory, Math, & Fine-Motor Materials

- **Sand/Water Tables:** Open daily, stocked with a variety of scoops, funnels, and thematic props.
- **Math Materials:** Counting objects, measuring tools, shape sorters, and items labeled with numerals are available in multiple centers (Blocks, Dramatic Play, Discovery).
- **Fine-Motor Choices:** Manipulatives, puzzles, art supplies, and small-scale construction sets are accessible to strengthen hand-eye coordination and creativity.

7. Music & Movement

- Musical instruments, scarves, and recorded music are incorporated into Choice Time and group experiences to foster rhythm, expression, and cultural appreciation.

8. Health & Safety Routines

- **Independent skills:** Children practice putting on smocks, washing hands with soap for 20 seconds, and managing personal belongings.
- **Family-style meals:**
 - Hands (children & staff) are washed before eating.
 - Tables are cleaned with soap-and-water, then sanitized with a bleach solution.
 - Children serve themselves with child-sized utensils to build self-help skills and community.

9. Smooth Transitions

- Teachers plan brief, predictable transitions (songs, visual timers, Mighty Minutes®) so children are engaged and waiting time is minimized.

Interactions and Relationship Building (Teacher-Student/Student-Student/Teacher-Family)

Aligned with ECERS-3 and TPOT frameworks

High-quality early childhood classrooms are built on strong, respectful, and nurturing relationships among teachers, children, and families. The social-emotional climate of the classroom directly supports children's learning, development, and sense of belonging. The following practices reflect evidence-based strategies drawn from the ECERS-3 and Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) frameworks:

Teacher–Child Interactions

- Teaching staff engage in frequent, meaningful conversations with children throughout the day, using open-ended questions and prompting children to reason, reflect, and problem-solve.
- Teachers demonstrate genuine interest in children’s ideas, preferences, and backgrounds, fostering culturally responsive and individualized interactions.
- Teachers consistently show warmth, respect, and sensitivity, using positive tone, facial expressions, and affirming language.
- During routines such as meals, staff sit and eat with children, model appropriate behaviors, and engage in rich conversation to build language and social skills.
- Teachers provide positive descriptive feedback, celebrate effort and accomplishment, and scaffold social-emotional growth through everyday moments.

Child–Child Interactions

- Children are encouraged to talk with one another during play and learning activities, strengthening their communication, collaboration, and friendship-building skills.
Teachers actively model and support positive peer interactions, including turn-taking, sharing, and collaborative problem-solving.
- Classroom expectations and routines reinforce kindness, empathy, and respect for others.
Teaching staff support conflict resolution by guiding children to express their feelings, listen to others, and work together to find solutions, avoiding punitive language or exclusionary practices.

Teacher–Teacher Interactions

- Teaching teams demonstrate collaboration and mutual respect by sharing roles, communicating positively, and offering feedback and support to one another in real time.
- Positive adult interactions model social-emotional competencies for children and help create a calm, predictable classroom culture.

Teacher–Family Partnerships

- Families are welcomed as partners in their child’s learning. Communication is frequent, respectful, and two-way.
- Teachers engage families through informal conversations, written communication, conferences, and shared celebrations of learning.
- Teachers recognize and honor the unique experiences, cultures, and values that families bring to the classroom community.

These relationship-based practices serve as the foundation for a responsive, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate learning environment. For detailed indicators, refer to *ECERS-3* by Harms, Clifford, & Cryer and *TPOt* by Fox, Hemmeter, & Snyder.

Home Support and Communication

Family engagement is a cornerstone of high-quality preschool education. Consistent, two-way communication between home and school strengthens learning, reinforces routines, and builds trusting relationships. In our Pre-K classrooms, we use multiple tools and strategies to support family connections and promote learning beyond the classroom:

Learning at Home

- While **HOMEWORK IS NOT MANDATORY** in preschool, we encourage families to:
 - Read with their child daily
 - Talk about what they're learning
 - Explore hands-on activities that foster curiosity, language, and thinking skills
- Teachers will provide **monthly newsletters** with:
 - Classroom updates and Study topics
 - Play-based activities that support learning in all domains
 - Ideas for incorporating learning into everyday routines at home

Communication Tools

To ensure families stay informed and connected, we use the following platforms:

- **ClassDojo**
Used to share real-time updates, classroom photos, reminders, and positive messages. Families can easily message their child's teacher and receive school news in their preferred language.
- **ReadyRosie**
A video-based platform that models fun, everyday learning experiences families can do at home. Each short video is aligned with early learning goals and shows real families engaging in math, literacy, and social-emotional learning through daily routines.
- **Teaching Strategies® Family Platform**
Connected to GOLD®, this platform allows teachers to:
 - Share individual updates about a child's learning and development
 - Send home aligned activities and resources
 - Provide insight into developmental milestones in real time

Family Involvement

- Families are viewed as partners and co-educators. Teachers will invite families to:
 - Share special talents, traditions, or stories that reflect their culture and experiences
 - Participate in classroom celebrations, projects, or Study-related activities
 - Offer feedback that informs instruction and strengthens relationships

Together, these tools and strategies create a strong home-school connection that supports the whole child and ensures every family feels welcomed, informed, and empowered in their child's learning journey.

Toileting and Changing

We encourage our students to use the bathroom independently so be mindful that belts and overalls are difficult for them to maneuver. Toilet training is on-going for those children not independent yet. All PreK staff are required to support children, according to their individual needs, with toileting and changing. Please find out from your parents if their child is or is not toilet trained. Work with the family to develop a plan that meets the child's needs.

Performance-Based and Program Evaluation Assessments

Why On-going Assessment?

In a high-quality early childhood classroom, assessment is **embedded into everyday interactions and routines**, not treated as a separate or isolated task. According to both **Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)** principles and the **New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards**, **observation-based, formative assessment** is the most effective way to understand and support children's growth across all domains.

Ongoing, performance-based assessment enables teachers to:

- Observe what children **know and can do** in the context of **authentic, meaningful play and learning experiences**
- Tailor instruction to meet **individual developmental levels**, interests, and needs
- Track progress toward **challenging yet achievable learning goals**
- Inform family communication, curricular decisions, and program improvement

On-going assessment is:	On-going assessment is not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Happening during regular, everyday activities ❖ Implemented on a continuous basis throughout the year ❖ Helping teachers meet children where they are ❖ Helping children meet challenging and achievable learning goals ❖ A broader and more meaningful picture of development ❖ Focused on the whole child, including cognitive, language, physical, and social-emotional domains ❖ Aligned with Teaching Strategies GOLD®, which supports the NJDOE’s expectations for preschool assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A formal or standardized test ❖ A narrow picture of a child’s ability at a given moment ❖ A one-time or one-size-fits-all event ❖ Conducted outside of the child’s regular classroom experience ❖ A tool to label, sort, or exclude children ❖ Performed outside of everyday activities ❖ A standalone screening process (although developmental screening is conducted separately as required)

Implementation Guidance:

- Teachers collect documentation (e.g., anecdotes, work samples, photos) across all parts of the day, including play, mealtime, group time, and transitions.
- Observations should reflect a variety of settings, activities, and interactions, providing a comprehensive view of the child’s development.
- Assessment results should be used to inform lesson planning, modify the environment, and provide targeted support to individual learners.
- Teachers use GOLD® checkpoints three times a year (Fall, Winter, Spring) to summarize and analyze developmental progress and set future learning goals.
- Assessment data should be shared with families regularly and respectfully, emphasizing each child’s growth, strengths, and next steps.

The Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT)

The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) is a research-based instrument designed to measure the fidelity of implementation of the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children. It provides a structured way to assess and support the use of effective teaching practices that nurture positive behavior, emotional regulation, and strong relationships in early childhood classrooms.

At Marion P. Thomas Charter School, TPOT is used exclusively as a coaching and professional growth tool, not for teacher evaluation. It helps our Preschool Instructional Coaches and PIRT Specialists to:

- Reinforce and build upon developmentally appropriate, relationship-based practices
- Promote social-emotional skill development for all children
- Identify strategies to prevent and respond to challenging behaviors
- Provide targeted training and individualized coaching
- Monitor implementation of Pyramid practices across classrooms for program-wide improvement

Structure of the TPOT

The tool includes **two types of items**:

1. Items 1–15: Pyramid Model Teaching Practices

Each of these items includes multiple observable indicators tied to high-quality adult-child interactions, such as:

- Teaching behavior expectations
- Supporting peer interactions
- Engaging in emotion coaching
- Providing descriptive feedback

These are scored based on the behaviors of all adults in the room, but when discrepancies arise, the lead teacher’s behavior determines the final score.

2. Items 16–32: Red Flags

Red flags represent practices that are not aligned with the Pyramid Model (e.g., punitive discipline, negative tone, lack of engagement).

Any adult observed using red flag practices will result in that item being marked, regardless of role.

TPOT Implementation at MPTCS

Each TPOT observation follows a consistent process:

Step	Activity	Duration
1	Classroom Observation	2 hours
2	Teacher Interview (Lead teacher)	15–20 minutes
3	Scoring & Analysis	30–45 minutes
4	Feedback & Coaching Session	Within 3–5 days of observation

TPOT helps ensure that classroom interactions reflect the core tenets of developmentally appropriate practice:

- Nurturing secure, respectful relationships
- Encouraging children’s self-regulation and autonomy
- Building inclusive, supportive classroom communities

- Responding to challenging behaviors with compassion and structure
- Through TPOT-guided coaching, we elevate every teacher’s ability to create emotionally safe, instructionally rich environments where all children can thrive.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Third Edition (ECERS-3)

A Tool for Assessing and Improving Classroom Quality in Pre-Kindergarten

The ECERS-3 is a nationally recognized, research-based assessment instrument used to evaluate the overall quality of preschool classroom environments for children ages 3 to 5. It provides valuable insights into how well a classroom promotes developmentally appropriate learning, engagement, safety, and relationships.

ECERS-3 is designed to assess how the **physical environment, materials, interactions, routines, and schedule** work together to support young children’s learning and development. It allows teachers, coaches, and administrators to:

- Reflect on classroom strengths and areas for growth
- Align daily practices with the **New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards**
- Ensure equitable, inclusive learning experiences for all children
- Set goals and action plans for continuous program improvement

ECERS-3 includes six subscales, each with specific items and indicators that describe what high-quality practice looks like in action:

1. **Space and Furnishings** – room arrangement, accessibility, display, cozy area
2. **Personal Care Routines** – meals, toileting, health & safety
3. **Language and Literacy** – books, interactions, conversations, print-rich environment
4. **Learning Activities** – blocks, math, science, music, diversity, fine motor, sand/water, dramatic play
5. **Interaction** – supervision, peer interaction, teacher-child warmth and guidance
6. **Program Structure** – schedule, transitions, whole-group vs. choice time balance

Each indicator helps ensure that **all children in the classroom** have access to materials, experiences, and interactions necessary for healthy development.

Implementation Guidelines at MPTCS

- **Frequency:**
 - ECERS-3 will be administered 2–3 times annually by the Preschool Instructional Coach
 - One formal assessment will be conducted by a state-approved external agency

- **Observation Protocol:**
 - A minimum of 3 hours should be dedicated to each observation
Observations should occur during the most active part of the day (e.g., Choice Time, group activities)
Most enrolled children must be present for the observation to proceed
 - Additional time may be used to examine outdoor space and learning materials more thoroughly

- **Use of ECERS-3 Results:**
 - **Teachers** use the tool for self-reflection and to set goals with coaching support
 - **Instructional coaches** use results to inform classroom action plans and targeted professional development
 - **Administrators** use the data to assess program-wide quality trends and track improvement over time

Why ECERS-3 Matters

When used as part of an ongoing cycle of reflection and improvement, ECERS-3 helps ensure that classroom environments are engaging, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate. It affirms the importance of responsive teaching, equitable access to materials, and consistent routines that promote a sense of safety and belonging for every child.

Teaching Strategies GOLD

Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD) is an online observation-based assessment system that helps teachers and administrators focus on children’s success. GOLD is grounded in 38 research-based objectives, which are predictors of school success based on school readiness standards, for development and learning that supports effective teaching and assessment. It provides specific strategies and resources for every type of learner, including dual-language learners and those with special needs. Teachers will:

- ❖ gather and organize meaningful data quickly, including online portfolios where children’s work can be stored;
- ❖ create a developmental profile of each child to answer questions “what does this child know? What is s/he able to do?” that can be used to scaffold each child’s learning; and
- ❖ generate comprehensive reports that can be customized easily and shared with family members and other stakeholders.

The 38 objectives at the heart of *GOLD* guide teachers through the assessment cycle, helping them to link observable behavior to essential early learning requirements and predict likely next steps in every area of development and learning. The objectives cover 10 areas of development and learning, including broad developmental areas, content areas, and English language acquisition. Many of the objectives also include dimensions that guide teachers’ thinking about various aspects of a given objective and help clarify the behavior it addresses.

The 10 areas of development and learning are:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Social-Emotional | 5. Literacy |
| 2. Physical | 6. Mathematics |
| 3. Language | 7. Science and Technology |
| 4. Cognitive | 8. Social Studies |

ESI-Screening Inventory, Third Edition (ESI-3)

Developmental Screening for Preschool Students

As part of our high-quality preschool program, and in accordance with guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education, all children enrolled in former Abbott district Pre-K classrooms participate in a developmental screening process during the the early weeks of school.

Our program uses the **Early Screening Inventory, Third Edition (ESI-3)**, a standardized, research-based screening tool designed to identify children who may benefit from additional developmental support. The ESI-3 focuses on three key developmental areas:

- **Visual-Motor/Adaptive** – including fine motor coordination and problem-solving
- **Language and Cognition** – including verbal expression, comprehension, and memory
- **Gross Motor** – including body coordination and balance

The ESI-3 is administered by the classroom teacher during natural, one-on-one play-based interactions, ensuring a developmentally appropriate experience that feels comfortable and engaging for young children.

The National Research Council (2002) recommends universal, locally administered screening as a key strategy for identifying children who may be at risk for learning challenges or social-emotional difficulties. By using the ESI-3, teachers can gather valuable information early in the year to:

- Support individualized instruction
- Monitor developmental progress
- Partner with families to address concerns early and appropriately

What Families Can Expect

- A letter will be sent home in early September informing parents/guardians of the upcoming screening.
- Screenings take place approximately 6–8 weeks after the start of school to allow children time to adjust to the classroom environment and build trusting relationships with their teachers.
- All families will receive feedback on the screening results, and if any concerns are identified, the teacher and support staff will work closely with families to determine appropriate next steps.

Our goal is to ensure each child receives the support they need to thrive, socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively, through early identification and strong home-school collaboration.

Kindergarten-readiness Assessment for PK-3 & PK-4

Marion P. Thomas Charter School (MPTCS) has developed a comprehensive, authentic, and ongoing assessment process to monitor and support the Kindergarten-readiness of all children enrolled in our Pre-Kindergarten (PK-3 and PK-4) programs.

Grounded in Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and aligned with the New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards and Teaching Strategies GOLD®, this assessment approach enables educators to:

- Observe and document children’s growth in all developmental domains, including social-emotional, physical, language, literacy, and math
- Identify strengths and needs to inform individualized instruction
- Plan engaging, age-appropriate learning experiences that reflect children’s cultural, linguistic, and developmental backgrounds
- Support smooth transitions to Kindergarten, with meaningful data that can be shared with families and receiving teachers

Pre-K 4 to Kindergarten Transition Plan

Vision & Guiding Principles	
Principle	NJ Guidance Alignment
Continuity of Relationships – children see familiar adults when they enter K	NJ Preschool Classroom Teaching Guidance: “children learn best when transitions are planned and predictable.”
Family as Partner – families participate in every phase	CPIS/Family Liaison must “ensure two-way communication during transitions.”
Multiple, Play-Based Touchpoints – children visit K environments more than once and in small groups	DAP: repeated, low-stress exposure builds confidence.
Data Follows the Child – observational data, GOLD® portfolios, and intervention plans travel with the student	NJ Guidance: share assessment results to inform differentiation.

Roles & Responsibilities

Role	Key Tasks
Campus Transition Lead (Administrator and Instructional Coach)	Coordinate calendar, staffing, and logistics.
Pre-K 4 & K Teachers	Co-plan joint lessons; exchange student profiles; support K teacher with lesson implementation.
Teacher Assistants	Escort children; remain with Prek students as assigned for support.
Preschool Intervention & Referral Specialist (PIRS)	Transfer PIRT files; brief K staff on supports.
CPIS / Family & Community Engagement (FACE)	Schedule parent events, translate materials, gather feedback.
School Counselor / Social Worker	Run “Kindergarten Chats” SEL sessions; monitor anxious students.

Four-Phase Transition Timeline

Phase & Dates*	Activities	Evidence & Tools
Phase 1: Planning & Family Launch Jan 15 – 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Transition Leads meet to align schedules. • Parent orientation night (virtual & in-person). • K teachers visit Pre-K rooms to introduce themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign-in sheets • Family FAQ sheet
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small groups (5–6 children) join K class for 1 hour literacy or math block on alternating days, mirroring the STEAM pilot schedule . • Teacher assistants accompany; K instruction continues unchanged. • Pre-K teachers observe once per month to note skill alignment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Observation Checklist – daily

<p>Phase 2: Classroom Exchanges Feb 1 – Apr 30</p>	<p>Culminating Transition & Resources Event <i>Family Friday during Week of the Young Child (April)</i> Families attend an interactive school-wide event featuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Storytime and make-and-take stations - Ask-a-K-Teacher Q&A - CST, nurse, and support staff tables - Portfolio displays and photo booth <p>→ Families receive a “Ready for Kindergarten” Activity Book</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Event sign-in sheets - Activity book distribution log - Event photos and family feedback
<p>Phase 3: Joint Learning & Data Sharing Mar 15 – May 15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddy-class projects (e.g., shared science inquiry, book buddies). • GOLD® spring checkpoint & Kindergarten Entry Profile drafted. • PIRS transfers any active intervention plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Performance Tracker
<p>Phase 4: Bridge to Kindergarten May 16 – Aug 23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Step-Up Day” where all Pre-K children spend half-day in their future K classroom. • Parent survey (second round) on readiness perceptions . • Summer send-home kit: sight-word cards, counting games, social-story booklet about Kindergarten. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Survey results • Final evaluation report (due May 31) • Distribution log • Sample kit contents
	<p>Optional 4-Week Summer Enrichment Program <i>Late June–Mid July</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance and participation logs • Progress snapshots • End-of-program family reflection form

*Dates may shift slightly by campus but phases remain consistent district-wide.

4. Logistics & Scheduling Guidelines

- **Group Size:** No more than 6 Pre-K children per K classroom visit to preserve teacher–child ratios.
- **Frequency:** Minimum 2 classroom exchanges per child (2 per month Feb–Apr).
- **Arrival:** Visiting children must be in the K room by 8:20 a.m. so routines remain intact .
- **Support:** Teacher assistants remain with the group the entire visit; K teacher runs normal lesson.

Assessment & Continuous Improvement Framework

Instrument	Collected By	Frequency	Purpose
Student Observation Checklist	K teacher	Daily during visits	Engagement & behavior
Teacher Feedback Form	K teacher	Weekly	Adjust grouping/supports
Parent Survey	CPIS	Mid-point & end	Gauge family perceptions
Student Self-Reflection (optional)	Pre-K teacher	Bi-weekly	Children's voice
Academic Tracker	Pre-K & K teachers	Pre/post	Measure growth, target summer supports

Data is reviewed at monthly campus transition meetings; adjustments are made in real time.

6. Communication Plan

- Weekly “Transition Tuesday” update via ClassDojo and email.
- Shared Google Drive folder for lesson plans, observation forms, and resource bank.
- ECAC quarterly report summarizing progress toward transition goals, per NJ code.

7. Sustainability & Equity Checks

- Ensure materials, social stories, and classroom visuals are culturally responsive and available in home languages.
- Monitor attendance so every child receives the same number of visits; offer make-ups as needed.
- Use PIRT data to guarantee children with IEPs or behavior plans receive consistent supports in K.

Special Services

Project Child Find

Identifying and Supporting Young Children with Developmental Needs

Project Child Find is a federally mandated initiative under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It requires every state to identify, locate, and evaluate children who may have developmental delays or disabilities and who may be in need of special education and related services.

At Marion P. Thomas Charter School, we are committed to ensuring that all children receive the support they need to thrive. If you believe your preschool child may be experiencing a delay in one or more areas of development, such as speech and language, social-emotional skills, motor skills, or learning behaviors, we encourage you to speak with your child's teacher.

Before pursuing a formal evaluation, families should work with the Preschool Intervention and Referral Specialist (PIRS) through our Preschool Intervention and Referral Team (PIRT) process. This allows us to:

- Collaboratively observe and support your child in the classroom
- Implement targeted strategies and interventions that align with developmentally appropriate practice
- Determine whether further evaluation by the Child Study Team (CST) is needed

This multi-step, supportive process ensures that decisions are based on ongoing observations, data, and family input, with the goal of meeting each child's individual needs in the least restrictive, most inclusive environment possible.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's development, please reach out to your child's teacher or our Preschool Intervention and Referral Specialist for next steps.

Preschool Intervention & Referral Team (PIRT)

The Preschool Intervention & Referral Team (PIRT) is a district-level support system designed to ensure that all preschool children, including those with learning or behavioral needs, receive developmentally appropriate interventions within the general education setting.

The team is coordinated by the Preschool Intervention and Referral Specialist (PIRS), a dedicated early childhood professional responsible for supporting teachers, guiding Tiered intervention practices, and ensuring alignment with the New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards and Pyramid Model framework.

Role of the Preschool Intervention and Referral Specialist (PIRS)

The PIRS replaces the previous "PIRT Specialist" title and is required in all state-funded preschool programs.

Responsibilities include:

- Coaching and consultation for teachers around inclusive, proactive classroom strategies
- Leading and facilitating PIRT meetings, intervention planning, and follow-up
- Coordinating Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for students not making expected progress
- Conducting classroom observations and modeling strategies
- Serving as a liaison between teachers, families, support staff, and the Child Study Team (CST)
- Reviewing and using data (e.g., GOLD®, attendance, referrals, behavior tracking) to inform next steps

The PIRS collaborates with the Preschool Instructional Coach, Social Worker, Climate and Culture Team, or Administrator, and CST representative as part of a multidisciplinary team.

Tiered Support System

Tier	Focus	Led By	Key Actions
Tier 1 – Universal Supports	Whole-class preventive strategies	Teacher + Instructional Coach	Establish routines, model behaviors, engage families, build emotional literacy
Tier 2 – Targeted Supports	Small group or individual supports	Teacher + PIRS + Family	Implement visuals, social stories, calming spaces, peer modeling, and monitor progress
Tier 3 – Intensive Intervention	Individualized behavior plan and CST involvement	PIRS + CST + Family	Develop Behavior Support Plan, increase adult support, consider referral if needed

PIRT Referral Process (Updated for PIRS Implementation)

- 1. Early Identification & Documentation**
 - Teacher implements 3–5 strategies for at least 3 weeks
 - Consults Preschool Instructional Coach
 - Begins to document observations, family input, and intervention attempts
- 2. Request for Assistance (RFA)**
 - If limited progress, teacher completes the RFA form
 - RFA includes strengths, concerns, documentation, and family communication logs

3. Initial PIRT Meeting

- Led by the PIRS
- Participants: Teacher, Family, Instructional Coach, Social Worker, Admin, CST (as needed)
- Review student data and co-create a Tier 2 PIRT Intervention Plan

4. Targeted Intervention & Monitoring

- Interventions implemented for 3–4 weeks
- PIRS may conduct classroom visits, coach the teacher, and provide resources
- Weekly monitoring for progress

5. Follow-up Meeting

- If progress is observed → Continue/adjust plan
- If little progress → Develop Tier 3 Behavior Support Plan or discuss CST referral
- Update goals and family supports

Best Practices for Implementation

- Maintain ongoing communication with families throughout the process
- Focus on strengths-based, non-punitive approaches
- Ensure interventions are embedded into daily routines and play-based learning
- Maintain detailed documentation of all strategies used, family communications, and observations
- Consult the Preschool Instructional Coach or PIRS regularly for support and guidance

The Goal of PIRT with PIRS Leadership

To ensure every child receives equitable access to high-quality instruction and behavioral support within the general education classroom, using strategies grounded in developmentally appropriate practice, inclusion, and relationship-based teaching.

[Early Childhood Advisory Council \(ECAC\)](#)

Preschool Through Grade 3 Community Collaboration

The [Early Childhood Advisory Council \(ECAC\)](#) is a required advisory body established by each district under N.J.A.C. 6A:13A-4.6, designed to support the implementation and continuous improvement of high-quality preschool through grade 3 programs. The ECAC includes a broad and diverse group

of members, school staff, parents, community leaders, and local stakeholders, who are committed to the education, development, and well-being of young children and their families.

The ECAC plays a critical role in:

- Reviewing preschool program implementation and ensuring alignment to NJDOE quality standards
- Supporting transition planning across the preschool–third grade continuum
- Acting as an advisory body to inform the district’s annual and three-year operational plans
- Elevating community voice in decisions related to facilities, services, and family needs
- Serving as a conduit between the community, school system, and early childhood programs

Structure and Operations

- Meets at least quarterly
- Includes representation from:
 - Parents and families
 - District preschool staff and leadership
 - Contracted providers and Head Start (if applicable)
 - Community-based organizations (health, mental health, early intervention, higher education, etc.)
- Led by the Community and Parent Involvement Specialist (CPIS) and a co-chair from the community
- May create subcommittees focused on specific areas such as transitions, health partnerships, or family engagement

Ongoing Engagement

- ECAC meetings are scheduled at times that encourage family and community participation
- Districts are encouraged to conduct a Community Needs Assessment (CNA) to inform ECAC priorities
- Families are strongly encouraged to attend, share their perspectives, and take part in shaping the preschool experience for their children and the broader community

By actively participating in the ECAC, members help ensure that our preschool program is responsive, inclusive, and aligned with both developmentally appropriate practice and state requirements for quality and equity.

PreK Substitute Teacher Guidelines

Please help to orient the substitutes that come in to work with our preschoolers by sharing the [guidelines](#). Upon arrival, Office Managers will share a copy. Teachers should also have a hard copy of the guidelines in their sub folder. If there are any questions or concerns, reach out to the Preschool Instructional Coach or Vice-Principal. Guidelines can be found [HERE](#).