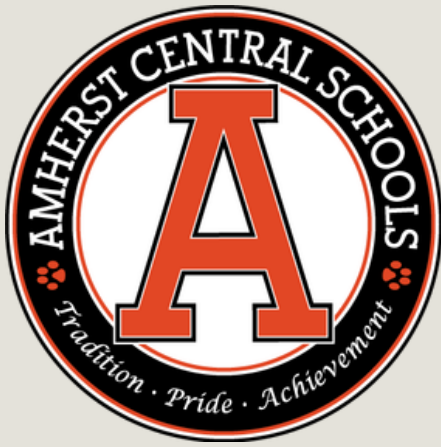




UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN

At Amherst Central School District

FAMILY HANDBOOK

Smallwood Drive Elementary
Windermere Boulevard Elementary
Amherst Community Church Child Care Center



Table of Contents



3	Our Philosophy
4	Curriculum
5	Academic Readiness
6	Character Education, School Rules
7	Locations, Transportation
8	Meals, Family Involvement, Attendance
9	Illnesses/Absence, Health Office
10	Tardiness, School Dress, Progress Reports School Closings, UPK Website
11	A Day in the Life of a Preschooler
12	Phone Numbers, Who to Contact When

OUR PHILOSOPHY



The Amherst Central School District is thrilled to welcome you and your four-year-old to our Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK). Prekindergarten is the start of your child's educational journey, and we are honored to be chosen as your partner in your child's pathway to success.

UPK is a developmentally appropriate, child-centered educational program. It is our belief that children actively construct their understandings of the world through continuous interaction with their environment. Amherst's UPK works to develop a love of learning! Children are eager to discover ideas, look for patterns and relationships and form generalizations. Through spontaneous activity, play, carefully prepared materials, and guided experiences, children gain confidence in their abilities as they explore the world around them. Our early childhood classrooms will provide opportunities for experimentation, exploration, discovery, challenge and interaction in a nurturing environment.

CURRICULUM

A balance of open-ended and teacher-supported learning activities, as well as purposefully developed classroom centers, help to ensure children have a choice of activities that support play and learning.

Developmentally appropriate practices emphasize that young children learn best when they are interacting with materials and people and when they have a choice of activities.

Our teachers skillfully design classrooms that encourage meaningful learning for all children. Our program follows the guidelines for “developmentally appropriate practices” established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Our curriculum is aligned with New York State Pre-K Standards, with an emphasis on early literacy and numeracy, as well as social-emotional development.

The importance of play is also an important component of our program.

Through play, children can learn and practice important skills while exploring and constructing understandings about the world. Play helps to build skills in language and literacy, math, sciences and social interactions. Open-ended play encourages exploration, sparks imagination, encourages risk taking, and provides opportunities to interact freely with peers and teachers.



ACADEMIC READINESS



New York State requires that all new entrants to the school district engage in a developmental screening. This screening includes cognitive development, motor skills development, language and literacy development (including a speech and language screening), as well as a vision and hearing screening. These will be completed by mid-October, and the data from these screenings help the district identify any students who may require additional services or support to help them be successful.

The results of this screening will also help your child's teacher identify areas of strength. Your child's teacher will notify you of the results of this screening.

CHARACTER EDUCATION

TigersCARE is the district-wide Character Education program that is also supported in all of our UPK classrooms.

TigersCARE represents the ten Character traits that are explicitly taught and highlighted throughout the school year: **Tolerance, Integrity, Gratitude, Empathy, Respect, Self Control, Courage, Acceptance, Reliability & Excellence.**



PAWS & Show Your Stripes

If your child is attending UPK at Smallwood Drive Elementary School, the school-wide behavior system is called **PAWS**. These four rules (**P**actice being a friend, **A**lways be respectful, **W**ork to learn and grow & **S**afety first) are reinforced in our UPK classrooms at this location. This inclusion of our UPK classrooms in this school-wide system provides a seamless transition to Kindergarten!

If your child is attending UPK at Windermere Boulevard Elementary School, the school-wide behavior system is called **Show Your Stripes**. These four rules (**B**e Kind, **B**e Respectful, **B**e Safe & **B**e Your Best) are reinforced in our UPK classrooms at this location. This inclusion of our UPK classrooms in this school-wide system provides a seamless transition to Kindergarten!

If your child is attending UPK at a Community Based Organization, the classroom teachers work to establish similar school rules from both elementary schools. In addition, your child will be exposed to the language used at both schools (PAWS Up & Show Your Stripes). The intentional use of this language allows for our youngest learners to transfer his/her knowledge of school rules to their elementary school in Kindergarten!

PROGRAM INFORMATION

LOCATIONS

FULL-DAY

Smallwood Drive Elementary School

School Day: 8 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Address: 300 Smallwood Drive

Phone: 716-362-2100

FULL-DAY

Windermere Boulevard Elementary School

School Day: 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Address: 291 Windermere Boulevard

Phone: 716-362-4100

FULL-DAY

Amherst Community Church Child Care Center

School Day: 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Address: 77 Washington Highway

Phone: 716-834-9701

TRANSPORTATION

As a result of this year's budget development process, UPK Transportation for the 2026-2027 school year will be provided by the District to all sites for any four-year old child that needs it (students must be four years old to ride a school bus).

The bus will pick up and drop off your child in front of your home. You will be notified of the times by email through the Parent Portal. Parents are expected to be outside waiting with their preschooler for pick up and drop off. A bus attendant will meet you at the door of the bus to either help your child onto the bus or to help them depart the bus. The bus attendant will not leave the bus. The bus attendant will buckle all children into their seats and ensure that the children arrive safely at school. Bus tags (child's name, address, and phone numbers) will be placed on your child's backpack. Please make sure that the bus tags are always with your child. No food or drink is permitted on the bus.

If you have specific bus concerns, please call District Office Transportation at 716-362-3045 or First Student at 716-684-9440.

PARENT DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP

- Parents have the choice to drop off and pick up their UPK students.
- In August, parents will receive specific details about the drop-off and pick-up rules for the site their child will attend. Please adhere to the rules so all children and staff can begin and end their day in a safe manner.

MEALS

Children eat breakfast and lunch in our full-day classrooms. Meals are served family-style which means we try to achieve the feeling one would get if they sat down to a meal with their family at a dinner table. Meal time is part of our instructional day, and meals will be served in the classroom. Staff and children sit down together because this is an opportunity for children to learn self-help skills as they serve themselves and pass food. They will socialize, learn about nutrition and practice table manners.



ATTENDANCE

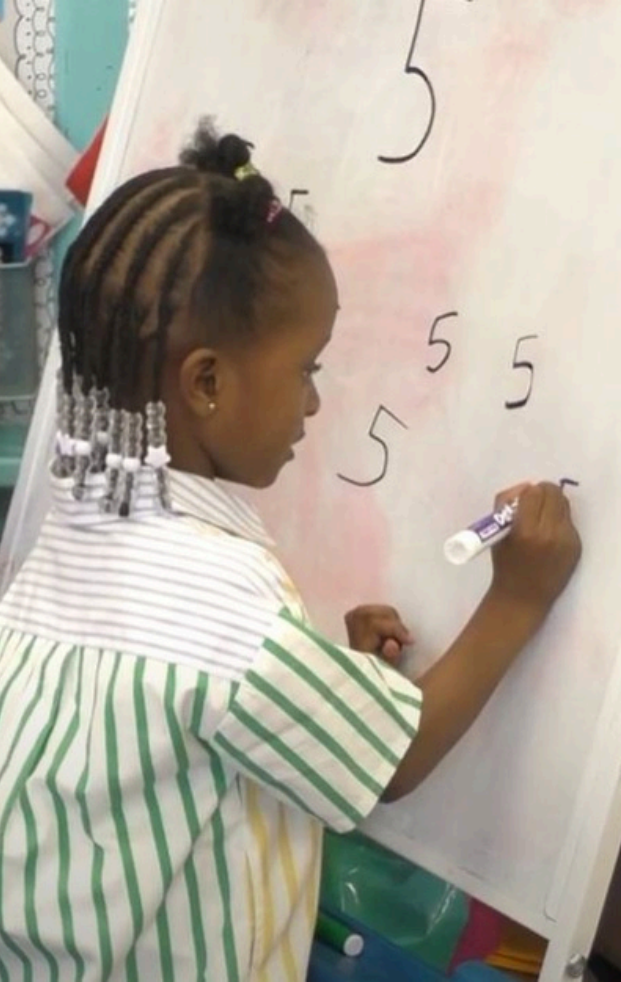
As a student in our UPK Program, your child must attend school 5 days a week. Chronic absenteeism is defined as 18 days or more. Absences over 18 days may cause your child to lose the opportunity to attend Amherst Central's Pre-K program. It is recommended that parents consult the calendar their preschool provides, which indicates days of attendance, vacations, holidays, parent conferences and other special happenings.

Please Note: Your child will not be able to continue in the Amherst UPK Program if you move out of the Amherst School District during the school year.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Children are most successful when parents, teachers and the community work together to meet the needs of the individual child. The Amherst UPK program believes that parents are their child's most important teacher, so our program includes many opportunities for parental involvement. We encourage you to participate in as many ways as you are able:

- Communicate regularly with your child's teacher. Share any special needs your child may have, events at home that may impact classroom participation, absences, etc.
- Check your child's backpack daily and talk to them about their day.
- Volunteer in your child's classroom. Parents are welcomed and encouraged to volunteer. Teachers will set up a sign-up calendar each month letting you know days/times available for volunteers.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences which provides an important opportunity to gain information regarding your child's progress in school.
- Attend special events in the classroom.
- Attend Family Engagement Nights.



HEALTH OFFICE

There may be times when your child becomes ill at school. In the event of an illness, the nurse or school director will contact a parent/guardian/designated person listed on the emergency card. Please notify the school immediately if there are any changes in the contact information.

ILLNESSES OR ABSENCES

- When your child is sick, please keep your child home. Any child with a temperature over 100 degrees, that has an undiagnosed rash, vomiting or has any communicable disease (strep throat, flu, chicken pox) is not allowed to be in school.
- When your child is sick, please keep your child home. Any child with a temperature over 100 degrees, that has an undiagnosed rash, vomiting or has any communicable disease (strep throat, flu, chicken pox) is not allowed to be in school.
- When your child returns, please send in a note explaining their absence.
- If you know your child will be out of school for an extended period, please let your teacher know at least 2 weeks ahead of time. Extended absences are highly discouraged as they create a loss in your child's continuity of learning. Extended absences may also jeopardize your child's continued participation in the program if we have a wait list.
- When your child will not be in school, please notify the site office.



TARDINESS

Please ensure your child is on time for school. This helps ensure your child has every opportunity to have a successful day! Arriving late or leaving school early creates lost learning time for your child, a disruption to their routine, as well as a disruption to the classroom.



SCHOOL DRESS

Please dress your child in play clothes and sneakers each day. They will be playing both inside and outside, in addition to daily gross motor time. Your child will be painting, building on the floor, and doing all sorts of messy things as our instruction is multi-sensory. Paint smocks will be used, but we cannot guarantee that they will not get dirty while at UPK. Please do not send your child in fancy clothes. Comfortable sneakers/gym shoes are essential.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Throughout the year, your child's teacher will conduct assessments of your child's educational skills and continually monitor their progress. This information will be shared with you at parent-teacher conferences. You will also receive two progress reports during the school year: at your first conference and at the end of the year.

SCHOOL CLOSING

There may be an occasion when school can not be opened due to bad weather or other unpredicted emergencies. When the Amherst Central School District is closed, all evening activities such as sports, after-school programs and Community Education classes are also closed.

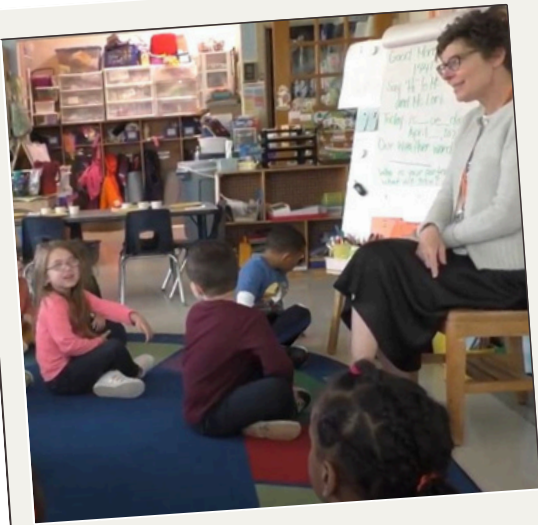
Our school uses the School Messenger system to deliver text messages straight to your mobile phone with important information about school closings, safety alerts and more. Your cell phone number must be on file so you can participate in this free service. Just send a text message of "Y" or "Yes" to our school's short code number: 67587.

UPK WEBSITE

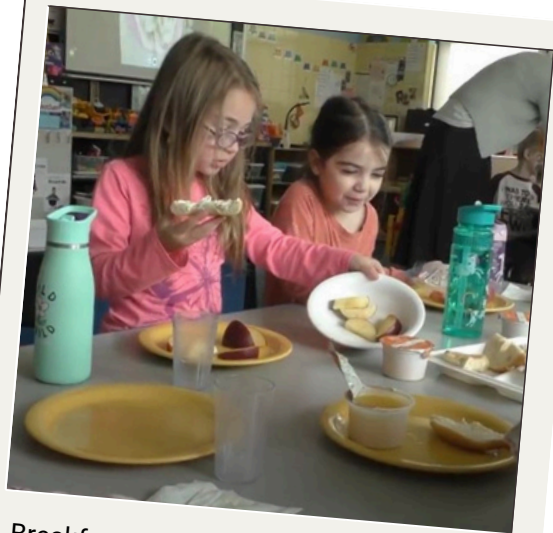
Additional information about Amherst's UPK program is available on the district website www.amherstcsd.org under the drop down menus:

Departments

Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program



Morning Meeting brings the class together as a community of learners to start the day.



Breakfast and lunch family style allows for social and self-help skills to be fostered and modeled by our caring teachers.



Whole group story time and reading lessons occur during circle time.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PRESCHOOLER



Whole group math and science lessons at the rug and reinforced at learning centers.



The dramatic play area models real-life settings such as a house, store, coffee cafe, or post office.



Classroom learning centers in art, math manipulatives, blocks, sand/water, and computers.



Gross motor opportunities in gym for hand-eye coordination.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Smallwood Drive Main Office: 716-362-2100

Attendance Line: 716-362-2249

Nurse: 716-362-2108

Windermere Boulevard Main Office: 716-362-4100

Attendance Line: 716-362-4249

Nurse: 716-362-4136

**Amherst Community Church Child Care Center:
716-834-9701**

UPK Coordinator: Karen Redding 716-362-4184

email: kredding@amherstschoools.org



WHO SHOULD PARENTS CONTACT WHEN...

Concerned about child's progress.....	Contact child's teacher at location assigned
A situation at home.....	Contact child's teacher at location assigned
Special services information.....	ACSD Office of Student Services, 716-362-3063
Transportation	ACSD District Office Transportation, 716-362-3045
	First Student, 716-684-9440
Child will be absent less than three days.....	Notification and note to child's assigned site
Child will be absent three or more days.....	Contact UPK Coordinator, 716-362-4184
Withdrawing child from UPK.....	Contact UPK Coordinator, 716-362-4184

UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN

Amherst Central School District
55 Kings Highway
Amherst, NY 14226
716-362-3051