

DO YOU WANT YOUR 4-YEAR-OLD TO HAVE A DOCUMENTED CHANCE AT A BETTER LIFE?



Do you have a child who is four years old or will be before August 15?

If so, would you like them to have: (1) a 14% better chance to graduate high school; (2) a 40% less chance to be arrested in their lifetime; (3) better reading and math scores through age 21; (4) a much lesser chance of being chronically absent and of failing high school courses; and (5) a much better chance for better health outcomes in adulthood?

And – since research indicates that roughly 85% of brain development is nearly in place by age 6 – wouldn't you want your four-year-old in a structured learning environment?

There's a way to achieve these things locally: Enroll your child in a Crockett County School District Pre-K program.

"For 19 years, I've had the privilege of teaching Pre-K at Gadsden Elementary School," says Suzanne Chapman, "and if there's one thing I know for sure, it's this: before children can truly succeed academically, they must first learn how to understand themselves and others. Pre-K is where that important work begins."

Friendship Elementary School Principal Leah Camp fully agrees.

"The importance of Pre-K is tremendous," she says. "It creates the foundation in which learning takes place. It is a place where kids learn how to listen to adults, learn to share with other children, and all there is to attending school. Whether it is how to stand in line, early reading and math skills, or simply how to eat in the cafeteria, Pre-K sets the bar for how children will do in school. It also is the beginning of school spirit and a way for the kids to show pride in their community."

While the statistics quoted above are from national studies, Maury City Elementary Pre-K teacher Whitney Sutton can localize them, based on her own classroom findings.

"Students nearly doubled their skills in key areas," she says. "They went from 45% to 85% proficiency in letters, a 40% jump. In numbers, the increase was 45%, from a 45% base to 90% proficiency. In rhyming, they went from 10% proficiency to 78%. These statistics are based upon testing from the start of Pre-K to the end of Pre-K in May. This was last year's information. I have been teaching Pre-K since 2012 and have experienced big shifts in academic performance as well as teaching kids what school is, so they aren't overwhelmed when they get to kindergarten."

The Pre-K programs in the District are supervised by Allison Smith, who is extremely proud of the individuals involved in teaching Crockett Pre-K programs.

"Crockett County is extremely fortunate with the Pre-K team leading our classrooms," Smith says. "The teachers have over 60 years of combined experience, with all having at least 10 years in early childhood. Each classroom has an assistant that receives the same professional development as the teacher and leads the classroom if the teacher is absent. As a Pre-K Director, I am blessed with the team leading our classrooms and introducing families to their education journey. We are all committed to welcoming each student and family to the schools and making each of them feel they have a part in the school family. Enrolling a child in school is both exciting and overwhelming for families. We want to make the adjustment as easy as possible, and I am thankful to the commitment our staff has in making families feel at ease."

While the initial push for local Pre-K registration was geared to a March 20 deadline, Smith said each of the three Crockett elementary schools can still accept Pre-K students. Applications are available from the individual schools; registration packets contain the necessary documents and a list of pertinent information. School phone numbers are: Friendship Elementary – 731-677-2718; Gadsden Elementary – 731-663-2453; and Maury City Elementary – 731-656-2244.



Chapman describes the typical Pre-K setting and the goals for the teachers.

"In our classroom, we spend our days building more than just early reading and math skills," she says. "We are building a love for school and our class family. We help children learn how to name their feelings, express their emotions in healthy ways, and navigate the ups and downs of being part of a group."

"For many children, this is their first experience in a structured setting with peers, and learning how to manage those big feelings is a huge milestone. We practice what it looks like to share, to take turns, to wait patiently, and to show kindness – even when it's hard. We talk through problems, encourage words over frustration, and celebrate small victories like using manners or helping a friend. These may seem like simple skills, but they are the building blocks of a healthy child."

Camp hears positive things regularly from the Pre-K parents. "It is amazing the work our Pre-K teachers do with our kids each day," she says. "They provide them with a safe place to grow intellectually and emotionally. They ensure our kids are ready for kindergarten each year. Many parents have taken time to talk about how much their kids love their Pre-K teachers. They talk about behaviors at home improving. I start my day each morning with the Pre-K students while they eat breakfast. I love talking with them about anything they want to discuss. Usually, it is something about their pets, siblings, or favorite television shows. The most important aspect is they do not realize they are learning. They are expressing ideas and thoughts and learning how to respect others in conversation, along with new ideas."

Maury City's Sutton states an important aspect of childhood success is the involvement of parents.

"A big aspect of Pre-K is the parent involvement," she says. "There has to be a cohesive collaboration from parents in order for students to make gains. It isn't all on the teacher – parents have to help too. But we love working with them, because we know it makes their households better."



"Pre-K gives children a safe place to make mistakes, try again, and grow," Chapman says. "It teaches them that it's okay to feel frustrated, that they can ask for help, and that they are capable of more than they think. Kindergarten teachers can always tell which children have had these experiences. They are the ones who can sit and listen, work with others, handle challenges, and approach learning with confidence. These skills don't happen overnight – they are carefully nurtured in the early years. After nearly two decades in this classroom, I've seen the difference it makes. When we focus on social and emotional growth in Pre-K, we are not just preparing children for kindergarten; we are equipping them for life. At Gadsden, we are proud to help shape not just strong learners, but kind, confident, and resilient children."

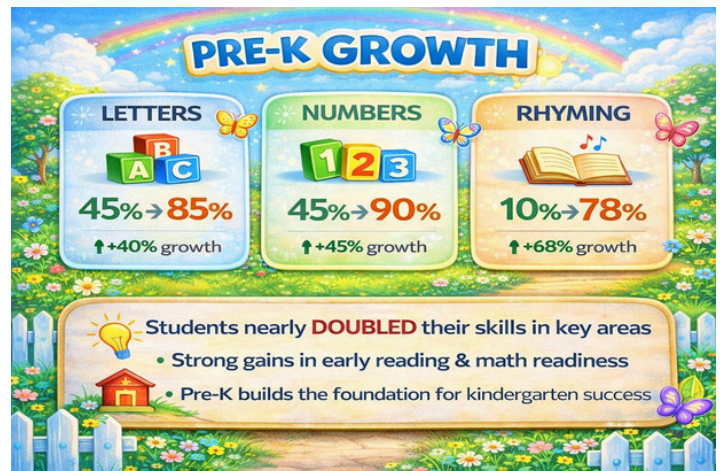
Camp relates a Pre-K experience that stood out for her.

"My favorite moment came this year when a student with delayed language skills ran up to me on the playground to tell me all about the flower she had picked," she says. "It was the first time I heard her voice after months of purposely seeking the child out each day to speak to her. It was a moving moment for me as an educator. It reinforced the work we all do each day. So whether it is an increase in language skills, trying new foods in the cafeteria, learning to open food packages, share, or stand in line, Pre-K teaches the skills needed in life that all of us use each day. Without these skills, they will enter kindergarten already behind, and in turn the academic learning will fall behind as well."

Smith echoes the desirability of moments like that throughout the CCSD system.

"Whether it is a hug and smile each morning, pictures or phone calls during the day, or that end-of-the-day hug and 'can't wait to see you tomorrow,' our staff works extremely hard to meet the needs of all students," Smith says.

She welcomes any questions regarding the Crockett programs at 731-696-2604 or allison.smith@crockettcavs.net.



Above: The following photos and facts are from Whitney Sutton's Maury City Elementary School Pre-K classroom and are indicative of the system-wide care and learning that CCSD Pre-K programs provide.



Above: Whitney Sutton, Maury City Elementary School Pre-K teacher.

Below: Suzanne Chapman, Gadsden Elementary School Pre-K teacher.



Above: Leah Camp, Friendship Elementary School Principal.