

Lincoln Preschool

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Introduction

The goal of the Lincoln Preschool is to provide a developmentally appropriate preschool experience that addresses each individual child's physical, emotional and intellectual growth. The program sets high standards for all children while valuing and accommodating individual differences, strengths and needs. The Lincoln Preschool is open to students between the ages of two years, nine months and five years and offers a variety of programming and schedules to meet a wide range of student and family needs. The Lincoln Preschool is fully-integrated, inclusive program designed to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. Children are assigned to classrooms with an appropriate balance of typically-developing students and students with disabilities. Faculty and staff are expertly trained to facilitate learning for all students in the program. The Lincoln Preschool continues to follow regulations issued by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care and maintains accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Program Growth and Changes

The Lincoln Preschool has six classrooms with four located on the Lincoln campus and two on the Hanscom campus. A seventh classroom, which was located in the Hanscom Primary School building, and operated since FY13 was reduced this year. The reduction was in alignment with the school's contract with the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA). The two classrooms at Hanscom offer morning and afternoon sessions for two and half hours. The third classroom at Hanscom had provided an on-campus option for a longer day. At this time, the only 4-hour day is offered on the Lincoln campus. Hanscom families have the choice of attending preschool on either the Lincoln or Hanscom campus.

In alignment with the contract from DODEA, the Lincoln Preschool continues to implement the requirements regarding eligibility of Hanscom Air Force Base children. As per the contract, during the 2015-2016 school year, all children who were born between October 1, 2010 and September 30, 2011 and whose parents are contract-eligible residents on Hanscom Air Force Base are eligible for a tuition-free placement in the Lincoln Preschool. For children who do not meet these requirements, the Lincoln Preschool has elected to provide placement opportunities for students between the ages of 2 years, 9 months and 4 years old that are offered on a space available, tuition basis.

Enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year was high with only limited available openings for students requiring specialized instruction or students who are not pre-kindergarten age eligible. Although certain enrollment patterns are familiar, we are experiencing an increase in students presenting with higher levels of needs based on current referrals. In addition, we are anticipating more referrals based on reports from Minuteman Early

Intervention and the Exceptional Families Members Program (EFMP). Data shared by the early intervention program noted that referrals during the 2014-2015 school year were nine percent higher than the 2013-2014 school year. Current caseload numbers shared from Minuteman indicate that this pattern will continue over the next few years. In addition, the program continues to experience higher levels of students entering the preschool with identified special education needs from other districts particularly at Hanscom Air Force Base.

Program Model

Although the classrooms are located on different campuses, the program operates under the same philosophy and vision. The Lincoln Preschool is committed to providing a safe and nurturing learning environment where students feel comfortable interacting with both adults and peers and where they are exposed to learning new concepts. The preschool teachers work collaboratively to discuss curriculum, assessments and lesson plans to maximize student learning.

While the classrooms on both campuses are viewed as part of one entity, there are some variations that were created to meet the needs of a variety of students. The Hanscom campus offers morning and afternoon sessions. Currently, there are two morning classes that meet five days per week for 2.5 hours each day and two afternoon classes that meet four days per week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) for 2.5 hours per day. The program on the Lincoln campus runs for four hours per day with a choice of two, three or five days per week.

In addition to providing support to typically developing students, the Lincoln campus provides a program that meets the needs of students identified with special education needs. The length of the program and the staffing plan support the inclusion of students with more moderate special education needs. In addition, the Lincoln campus also has an Extended Day program for students who require more intensive skill work as outlined by their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

The Hanscom campus was designed to provide opportunities for preschool students of Hanscom Air Force Base to attend an early childhood program. While all teachers at the Lincoln campus have dual certification in early childhood education and special education, this is not required to teach at the Hanscom campus. We currently have one teacher assigned to Hanscom that holds certification in both areas and is able to provide services to students with specialized instruction needs. These classrooms primarily support students who are typically developing or have been identified with mild needs that require related services including speech/language therapy, occupational therapy and/or physical therapy. If children require more specialized instruction, the parents and members of the school based IEP team will make the recommendation for a supported section with additional time to work on goals. The Lincoln Preschool makes placement and services recommendations based on the individual needs of the children.

Curriculum

The Lincoln Preschool focuses on the implementation of developmentally appropriate educational programming that is aligned with the primary school curriculum. The preschool faculty has articulated curriculum and instruction in the areas of math, science, English language arts and social studies. The preschool faculty is engaged in continuous improvement of our curriculum that is aimed at improving the team's ability to develop "kindergarten readiness" for students who are eligible for kindergarten in the next school year.

The Lincoln Preschool continues to place a specialized focus on the development of the children's social/emotional growth. The Lincoln Preschool faculty and staff engage the children in social experiences that also improve cognitive, language and motor skills. The goal is to increase the independence of our preschoolers in the area of social communication and play. The teachers are able to focus on identifying each individual child's social and emotional abilities based on data from our early childhood assessments including our social/emotional assessment, the Deveareaux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA). Teachers are able to utilize the team consult process to evaluate the social emotional needs of our students. In the classrooms, emphasis is placed on supporting the students in learning social communication and cooperation skills with their peers and adults from outside their home. For many of the students, this is their first social experience. Learning how to resolve a conflict, sharing, taking turns and listening to others are all important aspects of learning how to be effective social communicators.

The Lincoln Preschool Faculty developed student-learning expectations in all curriculum areas including social/emotional, math, science, social studies and English language arts that are implemented throughout the year. The learning expectations are published on the website and are active documents that the staff uses in planning the preschool curriculum and in communicating with parents.

Students

The students within each multi-age classroom utilize a range of skills and abilities. Students are matched with teachers and peers based on a variety of factors including but not limited to: gender, age, ability and learning style. The goal of student placement is to create balanced classrooms where students are exposed to peers with a broad range of strengths and needs. Some data describing the ages of our Preschool students is shown on the next page.

Age Breakdown Of Students 2013-2014			Age Breakdown of Students 2014-2015			Age Breakdown of Students 2015-2016		
Three year olds	Four year olds	Five year olds	Three year olds	Four year olds	Five year olds	Three year olds	Four year olds	Five Year olds
61	65	11	55	75	5	17	77	22
Total=137			Total= 135			Total= 119		

These numbers are based on the September 30th and October 1st enrollment reports.

Currently, 24% of the preschool population requires specialized instruction as outlined by their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). These children present with disabilities in the following areas: developmental delay, communication, health and autism. Additionally, there are nine students who have been referred for evaluations through the special education process. It is common for preschool students to receive short-term related service support to address areas of concern. The progress of each student is closely monitored and the team convenes to make recommendations based on the data. Students may also receive services through a Goal Focused Intervention Plan, which is a general education system of goal-focused interventions and therapies with progress monitoring strategies to assess effectiveness for student learning.

The level of need for each student with a disability was first defined by Massachusetts in FY 2001. The information is based on the amount of services the student receives, where those services are provided and the characteristics of the service provider. For instance, a student who receives all of his/her special education services in an inclusive general education environment, but receives such services over 75% of the school day by professional, certified special educators, would be characterized as having a high level of need. A student who receives services for only 10 or 20% of the school day, provided in the general education classroom by the general education teacher would be characterized as having a low level of need. The criteria are:

- One: Low (less than 2 hours of service per week)
- Two: Low (2-5 hours of service per week)
- Three: Moderate
- Four: High

The following table indicates the number of students with disabilities enrolled in the program by level of need.

Students with Disabilities by Level of Need 2010-2016				
	1 (low)	2	3	4 (high)
2015-2016	0	0	19	6
2014-2015	2	0	16	6
2013-2014	1	3	20	1
2012-2013	6	1	15	5
2011-2012	0	0	3	8
2010-2011	0	0	9	6

Students who qualify for special education services through an Individualized Education Program at the preschool level often require the provision of intensive programming by faculty with specialized training. The number of students who require specialized instruction at the preschool level has increased significantly over the course of the past year. In addition to the 25 students who are currently serviced through IEPs, there are nine students currently participating in the special education referral process with six additional referrals that will need to be processed and completed by December.

Staffing

The Lincoln Preschool has a highly qualified faculty with a comprehensive repertoire of knowledge, experience and skills. The faculty includes a coordinator, special education teachers, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech and language pathologist, social worker, school psychologist, tutors and aides. Professional development and training are provided for all staff on an ongoing basis which is an important tool in building skills to meet the evolving and diverse needs of the students.

The staffing plan for each preschool classroom on the Lincoln campus includes an Early Childhood Teacher, a tutor and an aide. On the Hanscom campus, the staffing plan consists of one Early Childhood Teacher and one instructional assistant. The Lincoln Preschool maintains or exceeds all teacher/student ratios required by the Department of Early Education and Care and NAEYC. The program is committed to recruiting and retaining skilled and experienced personnel. An overwhelming body of evidence connects educated and experienced caregivers, small group sizes and low teacher-child ratios with high-quality early childhood programs.

The current staffing model leaves limited opportunities for collaboration within a classroom teaching team. Due to the scheduling of part time teachers (.8 FTE) and paraprofessionals who serve other duties within the preschool (Extended Day child care and special education), it is challenging to schedule dedicated consultation time. The preschool team will be looking at various preschool models (staffing model, preschool scheduling) as it prepares for the new building project at Hanscom Primary School.

At times, additional staff is required to support three individual students. This determination is based on evaluation data and the recommendation of the preschool diagnostic team. In these cases, a student's IEP would articulate services that are intensive and highly individualized. These conditions can include safety risk, specialized health care needs and an intensive level of instruction to access the curriculum.

Accreditation

The Lincoln Preschool initially received accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 2007 and after careful preparation and a site visit last year, the program was awarded accreditation in December of 2011. In order to be granted approval the program needed to demonstrate that it continued to meet and/or exceed NAEYC's Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria which are based on a framework with four areas of focus including: children, teaching staff, administration and partnership. The accreditation is valid through December of 2017.

Improvement Goals and Areas of Focus

The Lincoln Preschool has set goals for the coming year to reflect areas for continued growth and improvement. The Lincoln Preschool is focuses on meeting the educational needs of preschool students as the expectations for all students increase. The school improvement plan is aimed at addressing areas that were recommended based on input from faculty and the community including more opportunities for student leadership, a method for monitoring students with social/communication difficulties and increased opportunities for targeted differentiation.

Conclusion

The Lincoln Preschool program is focused on meeting the educational needs of preschool students as the face of education changes and the expectations for all students increase. The Lincoln Preschool has expanded the program and refined teaching and assessment practices to provide a quality early childhood program. We are particularly proud to continue to provide children of all abilities with a developmentally appropriate curriculum based education that has been recognized by both the Department of Early Education and Care and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The Lincoln Preschool is committed to the value of a high quality preschool education for all students.