



LINCOLN PRESCHOOL

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Preschool

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Preschool Coordinator

To: Dr. Rebecca McFall, Superintendent
Buckner Creel, Administrator for Business and Finance
From: Lynn Fagan, Preschool Coordinator
Date: January 15, 2019
Re: Preschool Program Model

Introduction/Purpose of the Study

During the past year and a half, the Lincoln Preschool engaged in a comprehensive study of preschool programming (September 2017-December 2019.) Preschool educators were tasked with recommending a preschool model that best meets the needs of the preschool population in preparation of the new neighborhood at Hanscom Primary School. The team worked collaboratively to identify required elements and priorities of a preschool program and identify new elements that would further support student growth and learning.

The new facility for the primary school at Hanscom Air Force Base includes a preschool neighborhood. All preschool students who are residents of HAFB will attend class at Hanscom Primary School with the opening of the building (anticipated for September 2019.) For the past fourteen years, the preschool program on the Lincoln campus has been open to residents of Lincoln and Hanscom and children of faculty and staff. The move to the new facility provides many opportunities to the preschool team including but not limited to examining the delivery of services, affirming current practices and recommending changes to programming.

Program Description

The Lincoln Preschool is a publicly administered program that provides early care and education for students ages 2.9 years to five years. The preschool program was developed with the primary charge to provide inclusive educational services to children with disabilities. The Lincoln Preschool operates under the philosophy of inclusion, which is a foundational belief that all children can be educated together and therefore supports and aspects of the program, from staffing to curriculum, are designed with inclusion in mind. The program offers a variety of programming

and schedules to meet a wide range of student and family needs. The Lincoln Preschool (including both campuses) is a fully-integrated, inclusive program designed to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities.

Current Model

The classrooms are located on different campuses but operate under the same philosophy, vision and legal mandates. The classrooms on both campuses are viewed as one entity however some variations have existed to meet the needs of the range of students. In addition to providing support to typically developing students, the preschool provides a program that meets the needs of students identified with special education needs. The Lincoln Preschool makes placement and service recommendations based on the individual needs of the children.

Lincoln campus: There are four classrooms located on the Lincoln campus. The program purposefully has multi-age groupings. The inclusion of students of multiple ages is beneficial as it allows children to learn leadership skills, it serves as motivation for younger children, it provides a sense of security and provides more opportunities for development. In addition, multi-age groupings provide flexibility of programming and the ability to maintain balanced classrooms throughout the school year. Children of faculty/staff and residents of Hanscom Air Force Base (HAFB) and Lincoln are eligible to attend preschool on the Lincoln campus. The Lincoln campus runs two additional programs to meet the needs of the students: Extended Day special education and Extended Day child care. The Lincoln classroom staffing model consists of one Early Childhood Education teacher, one special education tutor and one special education aide. The classrooms can have up to 18 students per class.

Hanscom campus: There are two classrooms located on the Hanscom campus. Classes are five mornings per week for 2.5 hours (8-10:30am) or four afternoons per week for 2.5 hours (12:15-2:45pm.) Both have multi-age groupings due to the benefits for children and the need for flexible placements throughout the school year in order to maintain balanced classrooms. The program is primarily available to active military members that are living on Hanscom Air Force Base. In alignment with the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), students who are four by September 1st are eligible for a preschool slot that is tuition free. There is no additional programming offered at Hanscom at this time (i.e., Extended Day programming.) If this service is needed for the student, they are placed on the Lincoln campus. The Hanscom classroom staffing model consists of one Early Childhood Education Teacher and one special education aide. The classrooms can have up to 18 students per class.

Current Programming

	Number of Classrooms	Age of Students	Staffing	Hours	Number of Days/Week
Lincoln Campus	4	2.9-5 years old	1 ECE Teacher 1 Special Ed Tutor 1 Special Ed Aide	4 hours	2, 3 or 5 Days
Hanscom Campus	2	2.9-5 years old	1 ECE Teacher 1 Special Ed Aide	2.5 hours	5 Mornings/ 4 Afternoons

Process

The Lincoln Preschool team had the opportunity to engage in discussions, research preschool programming and observe in area preschools. The teachers began the process by identifying the program's current areas of strength and areas of growth/need. Observations were scheduled in inclusion preschool programs in neighboring districts. For programs that were not observed, the faculty and Preschool Coordinator conducted interviews of preschool teams and Early Childhood Coordinators respectively. The interview consisted of pre-determined questions in order to ensure continuity. Information collected from parent feedback forms, parent surveys and faculty surveys were utilized in determining the needs of stakeholders and in making recommendations for the new preschool model.

Required Factors (Driving Forces in determining programming)

In alignment with the contract from Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), the Lincoln Preschool implements the requirements regarding eligibility of Hanscom Air Force Base children. As per the contract, all children who are born by September 1st and whose parents are contract-eligible residents on Hanscom Air Force Base are eligible for tuition-free placement in the Lincoln Preschool. For children who are born after September 1st but whose parents are contract-eligible, the Lincoln Preschool has elected to provide placement opportunities for students between the ages of 2 years, 9 months and 4 years old. These placements can be offered if a space is available. These slots are not tuition free. To meet the DoDEA requirements, maximum slots are required to ensure preschool programming for children throughout the year as they move to HAFB.

According to federal and state regulations, the Lincoln Preschool is responsible for providing specialized services to students with Individualized Education Programs. We are required to provide twenty-five hours of programming for students that require intensive supports. The Lincoln Preschool currently has a four hour day (20 hours per week) with Extended Day (6 hours per week.) The preschool is also required to provide high level of staffing ratios to support the needs of the student population (three staff for up to eighteen students maximum.) The team believes there is a need to provide alternate programming for students that require a smaller group settings for part or all of the school day. There is also a need to consider and/or provide a smaller class size for those students with specific diagnoses (including hearing loss.)

Requirements of **603 CMR 28.00: Programs for young children** The school district shall ensure programs are available for eligible children three and four years of age. Such programs shall be developmentally appropriate and specially designed for children ages three and four years. Inclusionary programs for young children shall be located in a setting that includes children with and without disabilities.

When programming for the Lincoln Preschool, there is also a need to consider the requirements of the contract with the Lincoln Teacher Association (LTA) which includes stipulations for personal planning minutes, common planning time and a duty free lunch. As a result, programming needs include specials (art, music, PE/wellness) that provide teachers with the required planning time as well as common planning time. To address these needs, specials need to be scheduled strategically to meet all contractual obligations under the LTA.

Additional Factors that Were Examined

In addition to the DoDEA contract, special education requirements and the LTA contract, the preschool program study also investigated other factors including the number of students per class, completion of screenings, completion and amount of evaluations, classroom models, multi-age classrooms and technology. The preschool team used the information provided through observations, interviews and surveys and ensured these factors were addressed within the recommendations for the programmatic structure.

Input from Faculty and the Community

Surveys completed by faculty and staff indicated overall excitement about the opportunities that the new facility and schedule will provide students, families and teachers. Surveys included comments about the ability “to keep students in their own neighborhood school, easing the transition into kindergarten” and providing “A space that feels inclusive and encourages teachers to team and collaboratively work as one.” The preschool teachers specifically expressed that the facility would help support the transition process to kindergarten.

It was noted that there were many similarities between the faculty and parent/guardian surveys. Both indicated support of continuing half day sessions, the provision of specials, classes being multi-age, inclusion programming and the focus on student growth.

Parents felt that the teachers and the play based learning model were particular strengths of the program. They were interested in having a longer day option on the Hanscom campus. In addition, they were interested in the program offering a pick-up/drop-off line that would not require parents walking their students to class.

Proposed Model/Recommendations (Hanscom and Lincoln)

Hanscom

Two classrooms with morning and afternoon sessions

It is recommended that Hanscom have two classrooms that offer morning and afternoon sessions. The morning program will be in session Monday through Friday for 2.5 hours and the afternoon program would meet Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday for 2.5 hours.

Two classrooms with four-hour day

It is recommended that Hanscom have two classrooms that offer a 4-hour day. Parents and members of the educational team will have the opportunity to choose between 5 days per week (Monday-Friday), 3 days per week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) or 2 days per week (Tuesday and Thursday.)

Substantially separate classroom

It is recommended that a substantially separate classroom is established in order to meet more individualized special education needs of students that may experience

challenges in the inclusion classrooms of the program. The classroom will allow for modified schedules and inclusion opportunities with the preschool classes. Instruction will be provided individually and/or in small groups to preview, review, teach and reinforce skills. The students who are recommended for this programming require a high to moderate level of support due to decreased communication skills, challenges with social interactions, difficulties following large group directions and routines, difficulty adjusting to changes that occur in the typical day and challenges regulating sensory stimuli. The potential benefits of the self-contained classroom include the ability to educate students in the least restrictive environment within their community, an increase in the continuum of services within the school district, the reduction of students that require placement out of district. An improvement initiative was written for Fiscal Year 2020 to establish a self-contained classroom on the Hanscom Campus. The program will primarily be created by restructuring existing funding, programming and staffing. The new initiative is seeking the addition of one special education tutor, one special Education aide and an additional 0.1 FTE teacher to complete screenings and educational evaluations as part of the Child Find process.

Extended Day programming for special education

This program allows additional time and support for students who require more intensive skill work as outlined by their Individualized Education Program (IEPs.) It is recommended that the program be offered minimally 1.5 hours. The preschool team will be exploring the benefits of offering 1.75 or 2 hours. This is dependent upon the ability to meet the contractual guidelines (including personal planning minutes and common planning time.) This model would allow students to remain within the community and in the least restrictive environment. While some students may continue to require Out of District programming, some students that would otherwise require Out of District programming would be able to remain in district during preschool with these additional programmatic supports and structures. In addition, it is the hope that these students will develop skills that would allow them to transition to the kindergarten classes within the district.

Extended Day programming that provides child care is not being recommended on the Hanscom campus at this time.

Lincoln

It is being recommended that the two classrooms remaining on the Lincoln campus will provide four-hour programming. The classroom will continue to be multi-age and maintain the same staffing configurations. Extended Day programs for special education and child care will continue to be offered on the Lincoln campus. The child care program was created to provide low cost on-campus child care for faculty and staff (that are employed by the Town of Lincoln.)

Recommended Changes

	Number of Classrooms	Age of Students	Staffing	Hours	Number of Days/Week
Lincoln Campus	2	2.9-5 years old	1 ECE Teacher 1 Special Ed Tutor 1 Special Ed Aide	4 hours	2, 3 or 5 Days
Hanscom Campus	2	2.9-5 years old	1 ECE Teacher 1 Special Ed Aide	2.5 hours	5 Mornings/ 4 Afternoons
Hanscom campus	2	2.9-5 years old	1 ECE Teacher 1 Special Ed Tutor 1 Special Aide	4 hours	2, 3 or 5 days

Changes in practice (Lincoln and Hanscom)

With the new configuration of the preschool, there are recommended changes to current practices. Based on recent applications, tours of the preschool program and Early Intervention projections, it is anticipated that the two classes located on the Lincoln campus will have minimally 14-16 students. Historically, placement decisions had been shared with families in early August. With the proposal, it is recommended that Lincoln families receive notice of placement in late June.

With the option of 4-hour programming on the Hanscom campus, it is being recommended that the Lincoln Preschool initiate a lottery for placement. This is a new practice and will require the establishment of a protocol prior to the initiation of the application process. Due to the high number of families that relocate to Hanscom Air Force Base during the summer months, it is recommended that placement decisions be shared with families in July (past practice was to send placement letters electronically on August 1st.)

Need to be Addressed

In the process of completing the study, specific action steps were identified that will need to be addressed prior to the move in order to ensure a successful transition. It was determined that there is a need for specialists to be scheduled between 11-12 two times per week so that all preschool teachers on the Hanscom campus can meet (fulfilling the contractual obligation of common planning time two times per week for 45 minutes.) Two of the five classrooms already have this time built in their schedules when students are not in the classroom. It would require specials for two to three of the classrooms at this same time.

The preschool meeting schedule for evaluation teams will need to be organized to be in alignment with the district. The preschool team currently conducts team meetings on Mondays however there will be a need to have team meetings occur on both campuses (Lincoln and Hanscom.) The evaluation teams that attend the meetings are shared with the primary and middle schools therefore it is important that the coordinators and Administrator of Student Services create a schedule for seamless implementation.

Over the course of the school year, students are recommended for the Extended Day program if they require additional time for intensive work on their Individualized Education Program (IEP)

goals. The program study led the team to determine that there will be a need for more formalized entry and exit criteria for the Extended Day Special Education program. This will be important because the program will now be led by one teacher with support staff (the model to date has been two teachers with support staff.) The placement of an additional teacher will be required if enrollment or the needs of the students increases. The team will need to monitor the needs of Lincoln families for home support services which are currently served by the Intensive Skills Teacher. With the creation of the substantially separate classroom led by the current Intensive Skills Teacher, there may be a need to create a support system for home services for Lincoln families.

Financial Implications

The program study revealed potential financial implications. Due to the need for specialists to be provided at specific time (between 11-12pm two times per week for 2-3 classes), it may be necessary for the preschool to have specialists assigned to the program (preschool FTE specialists.) This is required to fulfill the Lincoln Teacher Association contract. If the Extended Day program for special education requires an additional teacher due to enrollment or student's need, there may be a need for increased teacher FTE.

During the observations in neighboring preschools and through interviews with Early Education teams, it became evident that the class size for the Lincoln Preschool is one of the highest. The majority of preschool programs have a maximum of 15 students. However, additional information is needed to explore the possibility of proposing a decrease in class size.

There was parent interest in an alternate drop-off/pick-up procedure. If the program were to implement this option, it would require additional paraprofessional hours and/or a teacher stipend due to the need to address the requirement related to specific seat belt protocols for preschool.

Opportunity

The Lincoln Preschool team gained a tremendous amount of knowledge from engaging in this programmatic study. The team was able to gain an increased understanding of many components: programming that is offered by neighboring districts and input from our parent/community regarding current programming and what they would like to see offered in the future. The team benefited from hearing from other preschool professionals and parents as they expressed that our preschool is a model program. It was an opportunity to reaffirm the programmatic components of our existing preschool model and the benefits to our students and the community. The team feels confident in their recommendations and are looking forward to the changes moving forward.