

Welcome!

Welcome to the Acton Public Schools Preschool. We look forward to getting to know your child and your family. The staff has created this handbook to provide you with information about the program. From the school year calendar to what extra clothes to bring, the most commonly asked questions are answered.

The Acton Public Schools Integrated Preschool opened in September 1994 to provide a local, integrated learning environment for all children. In September 2003 a center based early childhood program for students with identified Pervasive Developmental Disorders was initiated. The staff of the Integrated Preschool and those of the ABA Program now work closely together, under the umbrella of the Acton Public Schools Preschool.

The Acton Public Schools Preschool is a developmentally based early childhood program that provides each child the opportunity to learn and grow at his or her own pace. It is a fun place to play and learn for all children involved! Some children enrolled learn in a typical manner and others have identified special education needs.

We welcome and encourage parent involvement. Volunteering in your child's class and joining the APS Preschool PTO provide many opportunities for supporting the program.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask one of us.
Again, welcome!

The Early Childhood Team
Carol Huebner, Early Childhood Coordinator

Debbie Bennett
Julie Sleeper
Bethany DeLollis
Shelagh Conway
Jean Martignette
Susan DiTavi
Peggy Berko
Cindy Mate
Anne Dempsey

Niki Holtzman
Gay Prosnitz
Pat O'Boyle
Ginger Eaton
Amy Morse
Kristin Licari
Mary Jane Silva
Marcia Cece
Gail Leombruno

Cyndi Deshaies
Lisa Frisby
Gail Clifford
Wendy Greenhalgh
Vicki Downey

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Mission Statement of Early Childhood Services

All children of preschool age will participate fully in a learning environment within their community.

Acton Public Schools Early Childhood Services

- * Pre-referral observations, consultations and screenings
- * Special Education Evaluations
- * Direct service to meet the therapeutic needs of individual children
- * Comprehensive Integrated Preschool Program
- * In-house program serving students with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- * Preparation and assistance with transition to Acton Public School Programs.
- * Consultation with parents and staff working with children in area preschools and daycares
- * Collaboration with others serving young children and their families through the Acton Early Childhood Advisory Council, First Connections and Minute Man Early Intervention
- * Referral and consultation with other agencies providing services to young children with special needs as necessary

Curriculum

The Preschool Curriculum is in line with the Massachusetts Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks/Early Learning Guidelines for students of this age. The Curriculum can best be described as developmentally based and child-directed. It is a fluid, dynamic curriculum in which the content changes yearly depending on the needs and characteristics of each group of children. However, it is consistently based upon, and therefore reflective of, the following principles:

1. Developmentally based:

Each activity that is planned can be accessed by children at a wide range of developmental levels. Within one group, some children may only be able to draw an unrecognizable picture and dictate their description of the picture to a teacher, while another child's drawing may be very elaborate, and yet another child may be able to write the words themselves. In this way the activities are open-ended, with a variety of possible outcomes. What is most important is the process, not the end product.

2. Child-centered:

The curriculum based activities are chosen with the students' interests and readiness level in mind. The content should always be relevant and exciting to the students. They show the teachers whether this is true by their level of engagement. If the students are not excited and engaged, then the content or activity is not meaningful to them. For this reason, the curriculum sometimes takes an unplanned detour, if a subject emerges in which a great deal of interest is shown.

3. Team Planning:

All members of the preschool team, including teachers, speech/language specialist, occupational and physical therapists, contribute to the planning of daily classroom activities, to the greatest extent possible. This greatly enhances the integrated therapy/consultative model approach for delivery of therapeutic services that this preschool embraces. It also allows the team to draw on its vast reservoir of experience and creative ideas when designing curriculum units.

4. Curriculum Webs:

The curriculum is based around particular age appropriate themes, such as The Community, Animals in Winter, Seasons, Proper Nutrition, etc. Within each theme, activities are planned that address each skill area, including language development, language arts, fine and gross motor skills, social and emotional development, dramatic play and creative arts.

The Staff

Debbie, Julie and Bethany's Classes

Within the integrated preschool classes the lead teacher teaches with support from of two teacher assistants. The number of staff in each class may vary given the number of students and the learning and therapeutic needs of the students enrolled.

The program model is one that incorporates the use of integrated therapies. The Speech/Language Specialist, Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist and Occupational Therapy Assistants work in collaboration with the teaching team to provide therapy services throughout each child's school day. In order for this model to be most effective, the teachers and therapists consult with each other on a weekly basis to discuss each child's needs and learning objectives across all learning areas. Most therapy takes place in the classroom setting, with the therapists working alongside the teachers. All of our students benefit from the presence of the additional staff in class. It enhances the learning for all and increases the staff to student ratio.

Shelagh Conway/Room 1

Within this class for students with Pervasive Developmental Disorders, the staff provide instruction using the principles of the teaching methodology Applied Behavioral Analysis. Given this format and the students' needs, direct instruction generally occurs 1:1 or 2:1. There is some opportunity for small group instruction as well. Most students also spend a portion of each day participating in an integrated preschool class in order to foster social growth.

Contacting the Classrooms

All classes are housed in the Administration Building, 15 Charter Road. Each classroom has a phone with the following numbers:

Debbie Bennett	Room 20	264-4700 x 3262
Shelagh Conway	Room 1	264-4700 x 3238
Bethany DeLollis	Room 2	264-4700 x 3240
Julie Sleeper	Room 3	264-4700 x 3311

If at all possible please limit calls to the classrooms to times when the classes are not in session, before or after school. If your call is not answered because the staff

is interacting with the children, a message may be left and staff will return your call at the earliest opportunity. If there is an emergency, please call the Pupil Services Office, 264-4700 x3265 or x3268. Staff will quickly forward a message to your child's teacher.

The Schedule

The Preschool follows the Acton Public Schools Calendar (attached). During the first week of each school year, orientation visits are scheduled. Each class meets four days each week, Monday-Thursday. The exact hours of operation may vary year to year. During the 2010-2011 school year the classes will meet at the following times:

All Day Class 8:45 AM-3:15 PM
Morning Classes 8:45-11:30 AM Afternoon Classes 12:30-3:15 PM

No School Announcements and School Cancellation

It is the general policy of the School Committee to cancel school only in the case of extreme weather conditions or emergencies. Parents/guardians are urged, therefore, to use their own judgment concerning their child's attendance at school on stormy days. Whenever the weather looks bad, parents/guardians are urged to watch TV news or listen carefully to the radio to determine whether school will be closed or if there will be a delayed opening. ***If the Acton Public Schools are closed due to snow, all Preschool classes will be closed. If there is a delayed opening, no morning sessions (IPS or ABA) will meet, however the afternoon sessions and students attending the All Day session will meet beginning at 12:30 for all students.*** On rare occasions due to a snowstorm, the afternoon session might not meet. If this should occur the staff or Room Parent will call to make you aware of this. School closings and delays are broadcast at 6:00 AM on:

RADIO

WBZ (1030 AM) Boston

WHDH (850 AM) Boston

TELEVISION

Channels 4, 5 or 7

Cable - Channel 61

Required Documentation

There are a series of release forms parents must complete along with the application, when your child is enrolled in the program. **Please make sure the information on these forms is up to date throughout the school year. Inform your child's teacher immediately if changes should occur.**

The forms include:

- ***Emergency Numbers:*** The names and phone numbers of individuals staff should contact to care for your child if he/she becomes ill while at school and parents are unavailable. (part of the application).
- ***Authorization for Release:*** This form designates the names and phone numbers of those individuals who have your permission to pick your child up at school should you be unavailable. This list should include the individuals listed in your child's application as emergency contacts as well as anyone with whom you might be carpooling. **If these individuals are new to the staff they will be asked to provide identification before a child is released.** If an individual, who is **not** listed on your Authorization for Release Form, comes to pick up your child the staff must have your written permission prior to the release. The staff will not release the child without this permission. Thank you for your understanding around this policy as it is for everyone's protection.

Massachusetts School Health Record: Annually **before** he/she begins school we must receive documentation that your child has had a physical examination and that their immunizations are up to date. The School Committee supports the Massachusetts School Immunization Law, Chapter 76, Section 15 which states, "No child shall, except as hereinafter provided, be admitted to school except upon presentation of a physicians' certificate that the child has been successfully immunized against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, measles, and poliomyelitis and such other communicable diseases as may be specified from time to time by the Department of Public Health. State law also mandates the varacella/chicken pox vaccination or provide written documentation from a physician stating that the child has had the chicken pox. ***Children will not be admitted to school unless immunizations are up to date.***

Photo Release: This form gives permission for your child's picture to be taken for use in class, newspaper articles, the school district website and other promotion of the Preschool.

Home Language Survey: The MA Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education asks school districts to survey the families of children enrolled regarding languages spoken in each child's home environment.

On Line Emergency Forms: Early in the school year you will receive a letter with specific directions for completing the on line emergency form for your child. Please keep this information current, as the nurse will refer to this information should your child become ill while at school.

CORI Check for Volunteers (Criminal Offender Record Information)

On November 22, 2002, the Senate and House of Representatives passed a new law, Chapter 385 of the Acts of 2002 which took effect February 27, 2003. The law requires schools to obtain all available criminal offender record information about any and all volunteers and employees who "may have direct and unmonitored contact with pupils" under the schools' supervision. For example, parents/guardians who volunteer as field trip chaperones will now have to submit to the "CORI" process before any involvement in the schools. All CORI information is confidential and privacy will be maintained. Only a very few staff will have access to the CORI information which will be stored in a locked, secure site in the Central Office.

CORI forms will be distributed to ALL volunteers through the school office. Forms must be completed and returned to the Pupil Services Office in person as soon as possible. According to the law, the criminal history check must be completed prior to volunteer service. Once the initial "CORI" check is done, it must be completed every three (3) years. Volunteers with specific questions or concerns are encouraged to contact either Carol Huebner or Director of Personnel, Marie Altieri, at Central Office.

Health Policies

The health and safety of your children is one of the highest priorities for APS Preschool Staff. The full time registered nurse at the Merriam School supports our program. **If your child is ill please keep them home from school.** This includes flu, fever, vomiting, diarrhea or severe cold symptoms. As you can imagine preschool classrooms are a great place for sharing colds and other germs. Please contact your child's teacher and the nurse when your child has any communicable disease or any condition that requires special follow up. We appreciate your cooperation as we attempt to keep the spread of illness under control. *There are medically vulnerable students enrolled in our classes.* Also please make the staff aware of any allergies your child has or develops.

Accident and Illness

A sick or injured student will not be dismissed from school until it is cleared through the school nurse. In any serious emergency, every attempt will be made to contact the parent or his/her designee. The designees are listed on the on-line emergency card. Please list three people to contact with local addresses. In cases where parents or their designees cannot be contacted, the school's administrator and/or nurse will take whatever emergency action is deemed necessary.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health regulation requires that in the event that a student contracts chicken pox, she/he may not return to school until one week from the appearance of the last eruption.

Fever

Fevers are generally a sign of illness/infection. Your child should stay home if his/her temperature is 100 F or above. He/she should not return to school until their temperature has been normal (98 - 99 F) for at least 24 hours off any medication.

Cold, Cough, Sore Throat

Most children can attend school with cold symptoms as long as they do not have a fever. If your child has a cold with a fever over 100 F, he/she should be kept at home and your healthcare provider should be consulted. Your child should also stay at home if they have a greenish nasal discharge or cough production. A sore throat with a fever, swollen glands, headache, stomachache, or rash may indicate strep. You should consult your child's doctor for evaluation. If a child has scarlet fever, strep throat, or any strep infection, he/she may return to school twenty-four hours after medication has started. Children are not to be sent to school while waiting for the results of throat culture.

Rash

A rash is usually a sign of a viral illness. It also may be a reaction to medication, plants, or chemicals such as soaps or detergents. If your child has an unusual rash or it is associated with a fever, contact your doctor.

Stomachache, Vomiting, Diarrhea

A child with vomiting and/or diarrhea should be kept at home until symptoms have resolved for at least 12 hours. Your child also needs to be able to eat and drink normally before returning. Consult your doctor if you suspect dehydration.

Red Eye

Your child should stay home if he/she has red eyes that itch and/or have a crusty discharge. Consult your doctor for evaluation of possible conjunctivitis. Your child may return to school after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment.

Lice

Acton policy requires that students be excluded from school if head lice are found. They may return to school only after treatment and only if all lice or eggs have been removed. The child should report to the Health Office upon reentry.

Medication Policy

Whenever possible, prescription medication should be administered at home. When a physician specifies that medication be administered during the school day, the nurse should be contacted, and the following guidelines will be used to supervise medication administration in school;

1. All medication should be brought to the Health Office at the beginning of the day, by a responsible adult, accompanied by a signed and dated note, giving the nurse permission to administer the medication. Send only a 30-day supply (30 school days);
2. The medication must be in the original container, with a prescription label that includes the following information: child's full name, name of medication, prescription number, dosage, and time to be administered; and
3. Emergency medication will be administered when ordered by the family physician or the school physician.

Protocol Medications

1. Acetaminophen
2. Topical Medication: Caladryl, Bacitracin
3. Benadryl and Epinephrine (Emergency use only)

Parents must authorize the administration of protocol medication (throughout the year) by the nurse using the designated form.

Over the Counter Medication (except protocol medication) can only be given after a parent/guardian has supplied the school with a signed permission note.

Universal Precautions for the School Setting

It is imperative for the health of our students and staff that all blood drips and spills be treated as potentially dangerous. The HIV virus is transmitted by blood and other body fluids. The Hepatitis B virus can live dried on a surface for up to one week and has the same mode of transmission. Each class has a packet containing latex gloves, gauze pads, and a copy of the "Universal Precautions for School Settings." The precautions must be posted in a visible place in each classroom and office, and the glove/gauze packet must be hung or taped nearby so that they are readily available to students and staff. You are encouraged to take a few moments to read the Universal Precautions and stress to your child the importance of practicing them. If you have any questions, please see the School Nurse.

Reporting Absences: If your child will be absent from school please call your child's teacher by 8:45 in the morning. We get worried if someone does not arrive on time! Thanks.

Safety Drills

At various times during the school year it may be necessary for our classes to participate in safety drills along with other students housed in the Administration Building. **Most common are fire drills.** When the fire alarm sounds the staff will immediately take the students out the nearest door adjacent to the classroom to a safe distance away from the building the predetermined designated area. Generally, we are outdoors for only a short period of time. A copy of the FIRE DRILL EXIT PLAN has been developed for the school and is posted in each classroom.

Animals in the School Building

1. No animals may be brought into the school building without the permission of the Early Childhood Coordinator.
2. Animals must not be kept in the building any longer than necessary to serve the purpose for which they were brought.
3. If animals are kept in the school building, appropriate attention must be given to the protection and health of pupils and staff and to the care of and prevention of cruelty to the animals. No animal known to cause allergic and/or respiratory reactions to any student in a school will be admitted.
4. When physically handled, gloves must be used in order to prevent bites or infections in the following circumstances:
 - a. when the animal is unknown;
 - b. when gerbils are handled;
 - c. when there is any question about the temperament of the animal.
5. Only cages meeting school requirements for safety, sanitation, and adequate animal care may be used to hold animals.
6. Unless a cage has an automatic food and water dispenser, pets must be taken home on weekends. All rodents and rabbits must have wood to chew on in the cage.
7. Dispensable utensils are recommended for use inside cages. Otherwise, regular and frequent cleaning should be planned.
8. Cages, trays, and utensils must not be washed in sinks used for human washing or drinking. They should be washed in wash basins or sinks used for maintenance operation.

Snack

A light snack is provided for the children each day. Cooking is also a favorite activity that may involve making a healthy snack. If your child has food allergies or if your family has an alternative diet, please make the staff aware of any foods that should be avoided. Given known allergies there will be no nut products served in Rooms 1, 2 or 3 this school year. We appreciate your assistance with this.

Wellness

The School District has a stated Wellness Policy which the APS Preschool follows. The full document is available on the school district website. The staff follows this policy when planning the curriculum. We ask for your support when planning for your child's birthday celebration in school or for other classroom celebrations. Specifically, the policy states, "When celebrating birthdays at school we strongly encourage families to consider healthy options or low cost alternatives to food. Schools will communicate a list of alternatives to families." Teachers will provide you with this list. Again, thank you for your support as we try to make this a healthy learning environment for our students.

Extra Clothes

Whether from over exuberant water play or a toileting accident, it is always helpful to have an extra set of clothes at school. Please send an extra set of seasonally correct clothes, including underwear and socks, to school with your child. It would be helpful to have clothes stored in a labeled gallon size ziplock bag. If your child is wearing diapers please provide a supply of diapers and wipes. **Outdoor play** happens throughout the school year unless weather is inclement. Please be sure to dress your child for outdoor play, including coats, hats, boots, gloves and snow pants, when appropriate. **Mark each piece of clothing with your child's name!**

Family Participation

Families are an integral part of our program. Whether observing or volunteering in class, attending field trips, joining the PTO, you are encouraged to become involved in the Preschool. If you have a hobby, skill, song or family tradition you would like to share we invite you to do so.

Transportation

All parents are encouraged to drive their children to school. This provides the opportunity to connect with the staff as well as meet the parents of your child's classmates. Car pools are set up through informal connections each fall. This year drop off and pick up for Debbie's class will occur along the side walk adjacent to the Parker Damon Building parking lot. All other students will be met in the front lobby of the school.

Parents should park in the Parker Damon Building lot in the spaces marked as visitor parking that face the Administration Building. All parents are welcome to wait in the school lobby during cold and inclement weather.

Please do not drive through or park in the circle at the front of the Administration Building as these are marked fire lanes and school buses are arriving throughout the school day. Other spaces around the building are reserved for staff parking.

Remember the following is a safety rule. **Do not attempt to pass a school bus or van which is loading or unloading children. You must stop and wait for the bus driver to turn off the lights and withdraw the sign. There is a \$200.00 fine for passing a school bus while its lights are flashing and its stop sign is displayed.** This includes the buses parked in front of the school to drop off or pick up students. The safety of the children and all pedestrians is the heart of these traffic rules.

Children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are eligible to have transportation provided to and from school. This may be arranged through the Early Childhood Coordinator. **If your child uses transportation and will be absent from school, please call our Transportation Coordinator, Marty Finnegan at x3229, as early as possible.** A Transportation Information Form must be completed if your child is transported. *Please inform the staff should this information change during the school year.*

Visiting and Volunteering

As is true in all of our schools, Acton Public Schools ask that all parents check in at the school office, in this case the Pupil Services Office, when visiting the building. Whether volunteering, observing, or dropping an item off for your child or your child's teacher please proceed to the office first. Once there please sign the Visitors Book and obtain a badge to wear. All of this is done in an effort to keep our students safe and to keep interruptions to the classes to a minimum. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Acton Public Schools Preschool PTO

We encourage you to join the Acton Public School Preschool Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The PTO supports the Preschool throughout the school year. From serving as a Room Parent, planning and helping with special events and fund raising this will be a great way for parents to get involved and support the program. The initial meeting will be held on September 7th at 7:00PM in Room 3. Join us and see how you can become involved.

Music with Oren

Annually the PTO sponsors a variety of fundraisers to support our wonderful weekly music program led by music therapist, Oren Rosenthal. Oren interacts with each class for 45 minutes each week. Our grateful thanks to the PTO for this incredible addition to the Preschool Program. Just wait, you will be learning all of the songs as well!

Field Trips

Short local field trips related to the curriculum are scheduled throughout the course of the school year. Previous trips have included apple and pumpkin picking, visits to a farm, the post office, the police station and grocery store. The staff will inform you of these trips well in advance of each trip. In order to participate each student must bring in a permission slip signed by his/her parent or guardian. Parents who are available will be asked to provide additional support and an extra set of hands. Transportation to field trips is provided by bus. There is generally a nominal fee. Remember to volunteer for field trips parents must have completed a CORI Form.

Field Trip Policy for Children Who Have Insect Bite and/or Allergy Reactions Requiring Emergency Medication

Parents of known bee sting reactors and children with allergic conditions requiring emergency medication are encouraged to volunteer for field trips. However, no child will be excluded from field trips as nursing support will accompany the class if a parent is unable to attend.

Parent Communication

In order to keep families informed of class events each teacher publishes a weekly on-line newsletter. In them you will find information around curriculum, class events, upcoming field trips, class songs and favorite cooking recipes.

Teachers and therapists welcome your phone calls or emails with questions and comments. **Again, please realize that time before and after school will be the best times to reach staff by phone.** The preschool website is also a good source of programmatic information. Go visit the APS Preschool link (<http://ab.mec.edu>) to the Acton Public Schools Website!

Progress Reports

Formal Progress Reports are completed for all children semi-annually (January and June). Given their observations in class, the staff completes a checklist of skills considered to be developmentally appropriate for children of this age. The staff then meets with parents to discuss their child's strengths, needs and progress. In addition, children with special needs have their IEPs reviewed annually. Please do not hesitate to ask questions of the staff related to your child's participation and growth.

Tuition

Tuition is paid on a sliding fee scale. Tuition bills are sent twice each year in September and late January. Tuition is payable upon receipt. Parents may choose to pay tuition on a monthly or semi-annual schedule on the 15th of the month. Tuition checks should be made payable to "Acton Boxborough Regional School District" and sent to Carol Huebner, Early Childhood Coordinator, The Administration Building, 15 Charter Road, Acton.

Student Directory

At the beginning of each school year the staff in collaboration with the PTO will assemble a Student Directory including the names, addresses and phone numbers for each student enrolled in the Program. You will be asked if you would like to have your child's name included. Inclusion in the directory is voluntary. This is considered to be a confidential document for the expressed use by families for communicating around play dates and for communication by the Parent Council. Any other use is prohibited.

Registration

In-House Registration for the next school year will be held in early January for those children not transitioning to Kindergarten. In late January registration is then open to the General Public. Ideally, students will be three years old by September 1st to enroll and keep them in line with the APS entrance age.

Summer Services

Both programs do sponsor summer programs. Separate registrations occur in the spring. Participation in the summer program is recommended for some students in order to prevent substantial regression in their identified area(s) of special need. This may include speech/ language therapy, motor therapy or inclusion in the PS Summer Program. Each child's TEAM will determine the level of services provided at the time of the Annual Review Meeting. All other students may participate and will pay tuition. Some staff changes do occur during the summer.

Staff Assignments

APS Preschool staff is assigned as follows for the 2010-2011 school year.

Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 20
Shelagh Conway	Bethany DeLollis	Julie Sleeper	Debbie Bennett
Lisa Frisby	Kristin Licari	Ginger Eaton	Peggy Berko (W, Th)
Vicky Downey	Marcia Cece (W, Th)	Jean Martignette	Amy Morse (M, T)
Cyndi Deshaies	Gail Leombruno (M, T)		Mary Jane Silva
Wendy Greenhalge			
Gail Clifford			

Speech/Language Specialist, Gay Prosnitz and Motor Therapists Niki Holtzman, OTR/L, Pat O'Boyle, COTA, Susan DiTavi, COTA, and Anne Dempsey, RPT, provide services to children across all classrooms.

Welcome to you and your child. We are looking forward to a terrific year! Should you have any questions contact Carol Huebner at 978-264-4700 x3255 or x3268 or chuebner@mail.ab.mec.edu.