

# Rochester Pre-Kindergarten



262-8140

**Rochester City  
School District  
131 W. Broad St.  
Rochester, NY 14614**

## Rochester Prekindergarten

**Prekindergarten Newsletter**

**January 2006  
Issue 3**

### From the Director's Desk: Shirley Jung

#### Teacher's Forum

The Early Childhood Department is offering a monthly gathering for Pre-K teaching staff, designed to discuss best teaching practices.. Our next session will be held on Tuesday, January 24, at the Congress Facility, 353 Congress Avenue, (formerly school # 37). Session is 1:00 to 2:30 with additional time available from 12:30 and until 3:00 for hands-on and follow up.

Focus will be on  
Process Art

Please email your intention to attend:

Jeanne.herrick@rcsdk12.org  
or  
Sandra.blackman@rcsdk12.org  
or call 262-8170 or 8169

Please submit your ideas, articles, children's art, questions and comments for this newsletter by the 15th of each month for the next edition.

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New York State Education

Department (NYSED) is holding mandatory technical assistance meetings with a focus on community collaborations. Observers will be looking closely at the instructional programs. NYSED is revising the Classroom Review Protocol which will be distributed to programs as soon as it is received. In the meantime, having all the items of the Prekindergarten Classroom Review Checklist in place will be very helpful when the Technical Assistance Team visits Rochester. Of the meetings that have been held already, concerns have been expressed in the following

areas:

- Lack of curriculum aligned with New York State Standards
- No "end" goals (Student Outcomes)
- Lack of curriculum that is stated, purposeful and intentional
- Lack of teacher involvement in the learning centers
- Poor use of materials
- Lack of use of small groups to build on children's knowledge in meaningful ways
- Poor attention to children's language development

- Too much time spent in transitions; need to maximize the time the children are in program.

- Meals/snacks not served in family style; adults not sitting with children; adults not engaged in conversation with children during meals.

- Little focus on student outcomes & purposeful instruction

- There is a culture in preschool that "quiet = good."

- Few full-day programs

If you need help with any of the above, please call Jeanne (262-8170) or Sandra (262-8169).

### From the Teacher's Corner:

On Tuesday December 6, 2005 we successfully prepared 21 classrooms in the I Care Curriculum. Teachers left the training excited and ready to implement the curriculum. All the participants received the I Care Cat, CD, poster, teacher guide and plenty of best practices and activities.

We want to take this opportunity to thank our facilitator, Ms. **Barbara Decker**. Ms. Decker is an Early Childhood Educator and Mentor for the Rochester

Parent Preschool Program.

**Heather Palmatier**, UPK Teacher at Oregon Leopold, graciously provided this report.

The day after our training I introduced the I-Care Cat right away. The children took to him immediately. Beforehand, I cut out little hearts out of paper and wrote on each "I Love \*child's name\*" Love, I-Care-Cat" Everyone received a heart as a gift from the Cat, including the teachers and the I-Care-Cat him-

self (encouraging love for self as well as others). The children beamed as I-Care-Cat passed out the hearts and gave the Cat a hug and/or a handshake. Our cat is with us wherever we go, as part of the class. He even participates in our songs. Currently we are talking about the first I Care Rule--which can be implemented into just about any book. I am excited because I know that these children will benefit from having I-Care-Cat and the influence of peace education.

## NAEYC Conference, Washington, DC Highlights, December 7 - 10

The **NAEYC** conference provided over 20,000 attendees the opportunity to choose from many sessions presented by almost 2,000 respected early childhood professionals, many of them nationally known, including some familiar names to those who have attended the **RAEYC** and **NYS-AEYC** conferences in recent years: Becky Bailey, Bev Bos, Dan Hodgins, Tom Hunter and Madelyn Swift. In addition, there were hundreds of vendors, displaying their wares.

There were 4 full days of workshops, ranging from 1 hour to full day sessions. I spent the first day playing, in two sessions, the 1st was "The Play Experience: a Constructivist Workshop for Adults." We were given the opportunity to choose from an assortment of recycled materials and play, first individually and then in a group with other players. Following each play experience, we wrote about our insights and the relevance to our professional practice. Some things we noticed was how teacher talk stops the thought process as well as the importance of enough time, space, materials, opportunity for repetition and for children to tell teachers what they are thinking while playing. In the afternoon, I continued playing in a similar session with the addition of **Madelyn Swift's** thoughts on how children develop self-esteem, character & skills through play. Participants also shared their insights in this session. "Children create to express themselves. They should not make art to please a teacher. Unfortunately, many children create art that is personal and as a result, deval-

ued." When children are free to be, they are on the path to self-discovery, learning who they are, who they want to be and how they want to behave. This is character development. As they learn from their accomplishments and mistakes, they gain confidence and courage. They develop self esteem. When they feel right, they do right, which leads to better behavior.

In **Becky Bailey's** session, "You Can't Make Me: Five Levels of Defiance and How to Effectively Respond to Each," she spoke about shifting from control to building connections, from trying to get them to be good to us helping them manage and from reacting to responding. We need to tell our most difficult children, "I won't let you hurt yourself or anybody else. You've been hurt enough already." We do this with our eye contact, our touch, and our calm presence.

**Eric Hoffman**, in his session on Super Hero Play, spoke of children's need to feel powerful in their bodies and powerful socially. His suggestions included giving children different power symbols (have a policeman or other hero visit the classroom), make lists (magic words— what might Batman say?), storytelling with props, help humanize monsters and super heroes, discuss ways to solve problems and help children be heroes. Anytime a child does something to help someone else, he's a hero. Have an emergency kit with band-aids and rubber gloves. Ask what would help someone feel better. Let children make repairs. Support them on anti-bias and environmental issues, helping them be aware

of things that are unfair, such as buildings that are not accessible and litter in parks/streets. Children helping others is a powerful way to build self esteem.

**Jane Healy's** session on "Lifestyles and Learning Disabilities: How Genes, Brains and Environment Interact to Cause or Prevent Problems" provided insights on the interaction of biology and environment. Biology is not necessarily destiny. Many genes interact with the environment in almost every behavioral syndrome. After discussion of various learning disabilities, she gave suggestions for what we can do about it. Her final directive was to "Become a noisy advocate for children."

**Marian Wright Edelman** closed the conference, reminding us that we have choices for children. We can spend and mortgage every dime now or conserve our children's futures.

If you ever have the opportunity to attend a NAEYC conference, I highly recommend it. It is such an inspiring experience to be among so many passionate early childhood voices. NAEYC will be in Atlanta in November, 2006. - *Jeanne Herrick*

### Save the Date!

**Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

**Rochester Wolf Trap**

**Golisano Academic Center,**

**Nazareth College**

Look for details in next newsletter

## Bilingual Prekindergarten

by *Henry Padron*

Do you know that the Rochester City School District now has three full day Bilingual Prekindergarten classrooms?

They are located at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School N0.9, Enrico Fermi School No.17 and John J. Audubon School No.33.

The Bilingual Prekindergarten classrooms are a first in the RCSD. Research shows that a quality early childhood program makes a difference for all students who participate. This is particularly exciting because we now have teachers working with students in their dominant language – Spanish and preparing them for the rigor and demands that will come as they progress. To enter program,

children must complete a language assessment at the Registration sites.

The teachers are aware of the developmental language needs of the students and are developing a foundation which will add instruction in English in the coming grades. We are very excited about the Bilingual Prekindergarten program and hope that you call 262-8234 for more information.

## The Calendar: You're Still Doing It in Pre-K?

By Connie Valk, Children's Institute

Reprinted from RAEYC Newsletter/Website, 2004

Best practices in early childhood practice and the increasing knowledge of child development have led early childhood professionals to recognize that children spending time on worksheets, coloring adult-drawn forms, and drilling on flashcards have no place in a quality early childhood environment. Practitioners know that children need to be engaged in open-ended activities that encourage exploration and focus on play as a central ingredient of the child's entire development -- cognitive, social-emotional, sensory-perceptual, and physical. I celebrate the fact that in most prekindergarten classrooms, worksheets, coloring sheets, and flash cards have finally been banished!

Why, then, if we see the inappropriateness of some activities, do early childhood professionals insist upon retaining the "calendar ritual" at circle time? The "calendar ritual" (described in **Engaging Children's Minds: the Project Approach** by Lilian G. Katz and Sylvia Chard) starts like this: The children are seated on the floor facing a large calendar showing the month of February. Then the teacher asks them what day it is. They call out the days of the week. Eventually she/he coaxes them into agreeing on the correct answer. The ritual continues with numbers - the date, the number before and after, or patterns of numbers. The routine typically consumes twelve minutes.

Katz and Chard conclude that ***such daily rituals can undermine a child's confidence.***

***Time, space, and age are beyond the grasp of most preschoolers.*** Young children have poor recall of list-like information that is not embedded in meaningful context. In other words concreteness is the name of the game for the threes and fours, and the calendar ritual is frankly a waste of time. Katz and Chard conclude: Leave the calendar skill-building to five and six year olds, who are far more ready to grasp these concepts!

Okay, you are asking: "If I shouldn't be doing the calendar ritual each day, what should I be doing?" How can I introduce

days of the week and months and dates in a more child-friendly, concrete, developmentally appropriate way?

Here are some ideas to get started. You will be able to think of many more!

- As children come in the door on Monday, after greeting them, talk about what they did over the weekend. Introduce through conversation the idea that they do not come to school on Saturday and Sunday, but return on Monday.
- If there is a special event on a regular day of the week, mention it. For example, if Mrs. Jones, your faithful volunteer comes every Tuesday, say as children are leaving on Monday, "Tomorrow is Tuesday. Oh, good, that means that Mrs. Jones will come tomorrow." This way, children will gradually come to understand that days of the week are reoccurring events, and that particular happenings occur on particular days.
- Sing some songs about the days of the week - "Today is Monday, today is Monday..."

Read books about the days of the week and months of the year. There are lots of them out there. My favorite is **Chicken Soup with Rice** by Maurice Sendak, which gives a humorous poem about each month that children will be chanting before you know it.

If you still are wondering, what should you be doing if you're not doing calendar at circle time, I have a few ideas to get you started. Please don't do them all, but rather choose from them to add variety and spice to your circle time. First of all, remember that circle times should be short and sweet (ten minutes is plenty for threes; fours can sometimes handle 15 minutes) and the time should be packed with concrete experiences.

### Ideas:

Finger plays, songs, chants, flannel board stories, or poems (The Universal Pre-K music website, designed by music specialists with the RCSD is a great

place to get ideas - there are even forms to cut out and use for flannel board figures! <http://www.rcsdk12.org/prek/blocks>)

- Pass around and talk about an unusual feather found on a walk.
- Problem solve: "Let's think of kind things to say to the new girl who will begin tomorrow."
- When someone's new baby brother is born, talk about babies and read a book about them.
- Read a book related to your theme or to a new experience - give each a blueberry to eat, and then read **Blueberries for Sal**.
- Talk about a shared experience and write down key phrases on chart paper, reading the phrases quickly afterward (children can re-read the phrases at choice time if they like).
- Stay tuned for wiggles, and interject a movement activity or song - dance to a favorite jazz CD.
- Talk about plans for the day.
- Introduce a new center or activity.
- End with each child telling (or singing!) what his/her plans are for choice time.

So, the most important reason that early childhood best practice for threes and fours leaves out the calendar ritual, is that there are far more developmentally appropriate activities to do that will keep your children engaged and where real learning will take place. Allowing children to struggle with activities that are developmentally beyond their understanding is simply not good teaching practice. Let's leave the calendar ritual to the kindergarten or first grade children who are ready to grasp these concepts! (Check out [www.raeyc.org](http://www.raeyc.org).)

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**Rochester Prekindergarten  
"A Smart Way to Start"**

Phone: 585-262-8140  
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We're on the Web  
[www.rcsdk12.org/PreK/](http://www.rcsdk12.org/PreK/)

**Look for March 27 Superintendent's Day  
Workshop Listings in the February Newsletter.**

## **Coming Up!**

### **Expanding Literacy Workshop**

On Tuesday January 10, 2006

Time: 1:00-3:00 pm

Where: 353 Congress Avenue

**This workshop will provide fun and developmentally appropriate ideas and activities that promote emergent reading and writing for young children.**

**Make Sign-In, Journals, Letter Knowledge, Read Aloud Charts and other literacy activities part of your daily schedule.**

Facilitator: Ms. Ida Pérez, Early Head Start, Pre-school  
& UPK Coordinator for Ibero Early Childhood Services.

This training, Teacher Forums, and other workshops are in response to a survey completed by the UPK teachers in our Community Based Organizations. They are our main audience, however, please feel free to call or e-mail us if you would like to participate. We will do our best to accommodate you or any of your staff who can benefit.