

# The Gates County Preschool Program Not a **Small** Piece of the Puzzle



# Agenda

Greeting and Introduction – Lori Ward

Preschool Overview – Helen Smith

Foundations/SCS & Curriculum - Mary Umphlette

Inclusion – Armechia Boyce, PK Lead Teacher

Gates County – Lori Ward

# What *is* Preschool?

- Preschool is the general term used by the public when talking about programs that serve children 3 to 5 years of age but are not old enough to enter Kindergarten.
- Types In Gates County Schools: More At Four and the Exceptional Children's Preschool Program. Head Start is present but not administered by the Gates County School System

# More At Four Preschool

- Part of the Office of Early Learning at NCDPI
- High-quality educational experiences
- Enhances school readiness for at-risk four-year olds.
- Premise: “[To] be successful academically in school, children need to be prepared in all five of the developmental domains outlined by the National Education Goals Panel.” (MAF Requirements)

# Five Domains

Targeted by both the MAF Program and the EC Program

- Approaches to learning
- Emotional and social development
- Health and physical development
- Language development and communication
- Cognitive development

# Requirements to Ensure Domains are Addressed Appropriately

- Teacher certification and training (MAF & EC)
- Developmental Screening completed within 90 days after the first day of attendance (MAF)
- Medical evaluation prior to entering the program (MAF & EC)
- Approved curriculum (MAF)
- Knowledge and understanding of *Foundations: Early Learning Standards* (MAF)

# Requirements to Ensure Domains are Addressed Appropriately (Con't)

- Knowledge of IEP Goals (EC and MAF)
- Progress Monitoring (EC and MAF)
- Progress Reporting to Parents (EC and MAF)
- Referral for additional assessment as determined by screenings, monitoring, and/or parent concerns.

Research shows:

"Children's experiences and the skills and characteristics they develop during the preschool years are critically important to their success later in school. What children learn between birth and the time they start kindergarten lays the foundation for their learning and development for years to come."

*Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina  
Preschoolers and Strategies for Guiding Their Success*



For the second year in a row, North Carolina is one of the only two states to meet all 10 quality standards benchmarks for preschool education according to *The State of Preschool 2009*. This was published by the National Institute For Early Education Research.

Children in the More At Four Program have continued to exhibit patterns of substantial growth across key school readiness skills in the areas of language/literacy, math, general knowledge, and social skills. Even though the more at risk students scored lower in most of these skills at entry and exit of the school year, they made gains at the same rate as other children. For children with limited English, the program showed even greater benefits. Even though they scored low on beginning and exit test, these children made even greater progress over the Pre-K year than children at higher proficiency levels. The evidence suggests that children are benefiting from classroom experiences provided, in ways that help prepare them for greater success in school.

# Exceptional Children's Preschool

- Serves children from age 3 to 5
- Placement is based on need as decided by an IEP team
- Generally, placement in the classroom requires a moderate delay in 2 areas of development or a severe delay in 1 area of development *and the IEP team decides* classroom placement is necessary to meet the IEP goals.

# Foundations and the Standard Course of Study

- Foundations is integrally linked to the Standard Course of Study
- Addresses the 5 domains that lead to success in Reading and Math

# Kindergarten SCS and PK Early Learning Standards

| SCS (K)            | Approach to Learning | Emotional and Social | Health/Physical | Language | Cognitive |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------|
| Arts Ed.           | *                    | *                    | *               | *        | *         |
| Computer/Tech      |                      | *                    |                 | *        | *         |
| Language Arts      |                      |                      |                 | *        | *         |
| English Lang. Dev  |                      | *                    | *               | *        | *         |
| Guidance           | *                    | *                    |                 |          |           |
| Healthful Living   |                      | *                    | *               |          |           |
| Information Skills | *                    | *                    |                 | *        | *         |
| Mathematics        | *                    |                      |                 | *        | *         |
| Second Language    |                      | *                    |                 | *        | *         |
| Science            | *                    |                      | *               | *        | *         |
| Social Studies     | *                    | *                    |                 | *        | *         |

# How Does It Work?

- Through *active and integrative learning!!*
- Through addressing the WHOLE child - One activity may address several skills – teaching counting while developing physical skills by jumping...
- Through REAL experiences – climbing on a real fire truck, holding a kitten, making a sand castle...
- Through teacher knowledge of child development and an individual child's profile

# *Foundations* says:

- Children need hands-on learning experiences to develop the skills and knowledge described in the Widely Held Expectations. They learn by doing and they need time to practice what they are learning, to ask questions, to investigate, and to use what they are learning in their everyday activities. (page 4)



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# Centers (*of play? – absolutely!*)

- Encourages discovery and exploration
- Allows learning - by doing what children do best!
- Allows for small group instruction
- Allows for student skill monitoring
- Develops sense of autonomy and responsibility
- Builds self-confidence by allowing children to make choices

# Reading Center

- Designed to be a comfortable space where children can relax and enjoy books. Provides children with the opportunity to hold and “read” books, interpret pictures (make inferences), and to talk about what they have discovered. Making up stories increases higher level thinking skills, understanding of sequences, and builds vocabulary.

# Water and/or Sand

- The materials available in these centers, such as funnels, strainers, etc., provide children with the opportunities to develop their fine motor skills. While performing simple experiments, children are actually solving problems and developing logical thinking.

These skills are needed in math, science, and reading comprehension. We truly are laying the *foundations of learning*.

# Blocks

- The Block Center provides children with materials for designing and building, organizing projects, and implementing them. The children learn about shapes, sizes, and distances. They develop logical/mathematical thinking. They practice classification, measurement, fractions, order, balance, symmetry, stability, and cause and effect. By interacting with others, they develop social skills.

# Writing Center

- An excellent place to communicate ideas and messages through letters, words, and graphics. Children enjoy copying letters, and using the letters they know and to try out new words.

# Other Centers

- Music
- Housekeeping
- Art
- Math
- Science



# They just play in preschool...

- It is often heard...

“They just play in preschool.”

Please respond with – “As it should be. Children of preschool age are not developmentally ready to sit in chairs for long periods of time.”

# Appropriate Response (con't)

- Children are hard-wired to learn through play. With appropriate guidance and interaction from well educated teachers, the children's play is the appropriate tool used by teachers to lay the foundation for future learning.
- They just play in preschool – ABSOLUTELY!



# Inclusion

It is imperative that learning environments meet the needs of all students in inclusive settings.

(June St. Clair Atkinson , State Superintendent)



# Inclusion

## From *Foundations*

- *Children with disabilities will make progress on the skills and characteristics described in the Widely Held Expectations, although with great variation in how. They will make the most progress developmentally, socially, and academically when appropriate special education services are provided in inclusive settings.*

# Inclusion

From *Foundations*

- *A curriculum and classroom tailored to meet the needs of individual children meet the needs of all.*

# A True Story of Success

In 2007-2008 our county had

- MAF classrooms that served children with IEPs; however, the children with IEPs were mostly mildly impaired students in one area of development or had an IEP in the area of Speech-Language only *and a*
- PK EC Classrooms that served children with very significant needs.

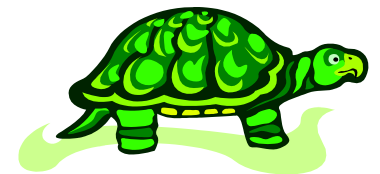
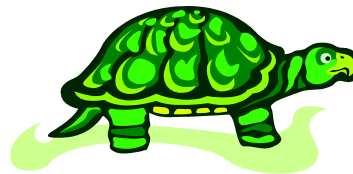
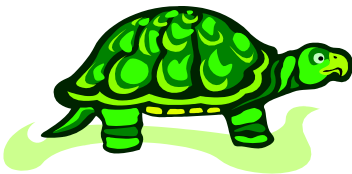
# A Transition

Each year we worked to divide the children a little more so that more typically developing children were in the “EC” classroom and the children with more severe needs were placed in the MAF classrooms.



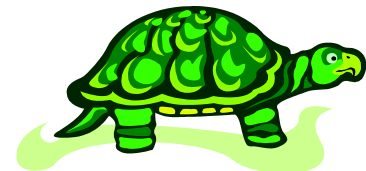
# *WHY* such a slow transition?

- We start serving children at 3 years of age and they become established in a classroom.
- Parents are comfortable with the services provided and are reluctant to part from an established relationship and routine that has been successful for their child.



# WHY so slow? (con't)

- These children were allowed to “age-out” of the classroom when they started Kindergarten and new typically developing children were placed in their slot.
- New children with special needs were placed in the MAF classrooms and slots were held for those potential students.



# The Transition is Complete

- All of our classrooms are considered to be a Regular Early Childhood Setting.
- This means that at least half of the children in the classrooms are typically developing students without IEPs.





# Has it really made a difference?

- Absolutely!
- No doubt about it
- YES!
- We wish we had done it sooner!







# HOW has it made a difference?

- Inclusion has allowed our preschool program to use not only teacher interaction, but peer interaction as well to foster growth of developmental skills for all students.
- Children learn from each other throughout the day.
- Inclusion challenges the teachers to set high expectations and goals for all students, allowing them to see the “typically developing” student everyday.

# The Gates County Preschool Program

- 51 Preschool Slots
- More At Four supports 39 children
- Exceptional Children supports 12 slots completely and helps support some of the children in the MAF program as they can be dually enrolled.

# Gates County

- Surpasses the requirements of the MAF program.
- All teachers have BK Certification or Preschool Add-On Certification. This means that they have been specifically trained to work with Preschool students.

# Teachers

- Two teachers were initially certified K-6 and went back to school for the Preschool Add-On Certification. They are our “experts” that help us prepare the transition from PK to K.
- As we have children with very significant needs in each classroom, each classroom has 2 assistants that also meet the criteria set forth by the BOE, MAF and DCD. This means that our assistants are also specially trained!



# Rigorous Evaluation

- Our teachers are evaluated like other teachers in the school system and a new evaluation tool will soon be released that is PK specific.
- Our program is monitored by THREE different programs
  - More At Four
  - Exceptional Children
  - NC Division of Child Development

# Go GACO PK

- We meet or surpass the bar of all 3 evaluating agencies and through our evaluation process for students have evidence that our interventions and instructions have increased the children's readiness to enter Kindergarten: on the same playing field as other children, better prepared than other children, or at least, better prepared than they would have been without PK.