



## The Early Learning Center Special Needs Preschool Westerville City Schools

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### *We appreciate your interest in our Special Needs Preschool Program!*

As you know, there are many preschool options across our community, and we are similar to them in many ways. Our center follows Ohio's Early Learning Standards, and is held to the same licensing and accreditation expectations as other programs. For more information on Ohio's Early Learning Standards: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Early-Learning/Early-Learning-Content-Standards>

On the other hand, our preschool is fundamentally different from the other programs since our primary directive is to identify preschool students with disabilities and provide them with the special education services that they need. These special education services can be provided through a variety of models and in a number of locations across our community.



When students with disabilities are served in our center based program at the Early Learning Center, they receive their specialized instruction in a developmentally appropriate preschool classroom. An essential component of this experience is learning side-by-side with typically developing peers who can serve as role models and provide positive peer-interactions.

Students enrolled as non-disabled peers in inclusive preschool settings tend to:

- develop meaningful relationships with peers who have disabilities.
- learn leadership and helping skills by modeling appropriate play and communication for their friends with disabilities.
- benefit from the same high-quality curriculum and center activities as their disabled peers.

Our center operates Monday through Thursday with 2 hour 30 minute sessions in the morning and afternoon. Class size limits are set by state and federal law and limited to a maximum of 16 students, with no more than 8 peer models per classroom.

We are seeking a limited number of non-disabled peer models to participate in our preschool center program for the school year.

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***Selecting the right preschool is not an easy decision for families.***

Although any student without a disability is eligible to be a peer model at The Early Learning Center, that doesn't mean that it is the right fit for all students.

In addition to their own learning, Peer Models play an important role in the learning of our students with disabilities. Once students have had an opportunity to transition into the classroom, our Peer Models are expected to participate in the classroom routine with minimal prompting from staff and should not regularly have behaviors that divert the attention of staff away from the students who need specialized instruction. Our center is a wonderful option where all students learn to value diversity, recognize the gifts in everyone, and lend a hand when needed.

***Families should consider, is your child able to:***

- independently use the bathroom
- wash and dry their hands
- manage their belongings / hang up coat
- feed self with utensils
- wait patiently for attention (within reason)
- answer yes, no, who, what, where questions
- follow simple directions
- entertain self for at least five minutes
- demonstrate familiarity with basic classroom supplies
- attend to a short story
- drink from a cup
- wait for turn
- initiate interactions with peers
- share with peers

You might also want to consider how your child might respond to

playing and interacting with students with special needs. All of our classrooms serve students with a range of disabilities that include communication, cognition, physical, social and emotional needs. On occasion, peer models might observe behaviors, emotional outbursts, or medical needs that they would not see in other centers. It is important that the families of peer models are ready to answer the questions their children might have and support inclusive friendships.



***Requirements for non-disabled peers:***

- Must be a resident of Westerville City Schools and meet the conditions for enrollment
- Must not be eligible for Special Education Services
- Priority will be given to students who will be turning 4 or 5 years old before December 1<sup>st</sup> of the school year. (Not eligible if turning 6 years old before December 1<sup>st</sup>)

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- Consideration will be given to students who will be turning 3 before August 15<sup>th</sup> of the school year.
- Must be potty trained

***Requirements for parents of non-disabled peers:***

- Pay monthly tuition
- Pay annual student fees
- Provide transportation to and from school
- Provide daily healthy snack for your child
- Keep all information confidential that pertains to students enrolled in our program



***What's the next step?***

1. First, as a family, decide if applying to be a peer model is right for your child.
2. If it is right, use the link to add your name to our potential peer model list.
3. You will be expected to attend a mandatory Peer Parent Meeting. This will be for adults only and will give you a chance to learn more about our program and expectations before moving forward.
4. Following the visit, you will receive instructions on how to pre-enroll with Westerville Schools.
5. Based on our need for peers, the students will be offered a morning or afternoon position in the order they are listed on our potential peer model list. We hope to have contacted everyone by late April.
6. Families selecting to accept the placement will need to make an appointment at the Enrollment Center to finalize the enrollment process. They will also need to make their first tuition payment and pay school fees at the Early Learning Center by date requested to hold their placement.
7. Families of Peer Models will receive a "Back to School" mailing in early August, and will be invited to the back to school events.
8. Families will be notified of their class or teacher assignment once all materials are collected at the back to school events.

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**Please be certain that the email address you provide is active and checked regularly. This will be our primary means of communication. Deadlines will be enforced regardless of whether or not you checked the email account.**

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### **Some Common Questions:**

#### ***Why does a public school provide preschool?***

Public schools are required by state and federal law to identify and provide services to students with disabilities beginning on their third birthday. Students with disabilities are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Because of FAPE, we are required to provide preschool special education services. Peer models are included in our program as part of our students' LRE.

#### ***Where is the ELC preschool located?***

The Early Learning Center is operated by Westerville City Schools. It is located on the lower level of the Administration Building, 936 Eastwind Dr, Westerville OH 43081.

#### ***Who teaches the students?***

Each class is taught by a licensed preschool teacher and a trained teacher assistant. Other related service staff are in the classrooms daily according to the need of the students.

#### ***Will all students get a spot?***

Like other programs, we have limited seats available. All students will not get a spot. High quality preschool experiences are important for kindergarten readiness so please keep other programs in mind!

#### ***What is the cost?***

Our peer models pay 9 monthly tuition payments in the amount of \$150.00. The first payment will be due after you have attended the parent meeting which is applied to August tuition. Subsequent payments will be due the first of every month with the last payment being due on April 1st. This is not reduced based on need.

#### ***Does the district provide transportation?***

Although the district is required to transport students with disabilities, transportation is not provided for peer models.

#### ***Are there any other costs?***

Yes, both students with disabilities and peer models pay an annual student fee. This year the fee is \$15.50, however it is subject to change annually. This is reduced for students who meet the requirements for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

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***When do the preschoolers attend school?***

Our students attend Monday through Thursday as part of our morning or afternoon session. The exact times could vary from year to year, but each session is two and a half hours long. We follow the Westerville Schools Kindergarten Calendar.

***What if I have more than one child?***

There is no priority based on siblings. Families are, however, encouraged to add all preschool eligible students to the potential peer model list at the same time to increase the likelihood that they will be accepted together.

***How are Peer Models selected?***

Once we know what spots we need filled, we will start contacting families through e-mail with students that turn 4 or 5 years old before December 1<sup>st</sup> in the order they are listed on our potential peer model list. Families will be asked to commit or decline the spot quickly so that open spots can be offered to other families. If spots remain we will contact families with students that turn 3 before August 15<sup>th</sup>. At times, consideration will be given for extenuating circumstances or age and gender balance in each preschool class.

***What if I want my child to attend as a peer model more than one year?***

Once your child attends our program, they will be offered a seat the next year as long as they meet the age requirements and have not begun the kindergarten enrollment process. Peers are not expected to attend our program for more than two years.

***What if I don't want to send my child to kindergarten when they are five?***

If your child has been in our program for two years or will be turning six before December 1st they will not be permitted to return for another year.

***How are students assigned to classrooms?***

Peer Models will be offered a spot based on the needs of the program. Our classrooms are not designated by age, however some have more first year students than others

***How will I know how my child is doing?***

Our staff are excellent communicators! In addition to quarterly achievement records (we used to call them grade cards), most teachers regularly send home a newsletter and other information. Since parents of peers transport their children, one advantage that they have is daily interaction at drop off and pick up. A lot of information is shared in those informal conversations!

***What if my family's situation changes and I need to change from one session to another?***

Although we want to work with families, we are required to meet certain ratios; making changes is very difficult and unlikely to be honored.

***How will I know if the ELC is the best place for my child?***

To some extent, you won't. Although we are an appropriate placement for virtually all peers, we might not be the best fit for every child. Because we care about our peer models, it is not uncommon for our Director to meet with families and talk about the fit of our program for a particular child. Instances include:

- if a child is very bright and gets easily bored, being in a classroom that designs the instruction for students with disabilities might not be where they will be challenged and grow the most.

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- if a child copies the behaviors of others, they might benefit from being in a program with typical behaviors.
- if a child is impatient or overbearing with other children, they might benefit from other experiences before attending a program with students who learn differently or are medically / emotionally vulnerable.
- if a child needs strong language models, typical preschools are likely to be a better fit than our program where many of our students are delayed in their communication.

***What if my child struggles in preschool?***

We recognize that all students this age need time to adjust and have a range of strengths and weaknesses - this is typical. If your child needs support beyond what is typical, we will discuss that with you.

***What if I want to learn more about The Early Learning Center?***

Check us out on the web at [www.wcsoh.org/preschool](http://www.wcsoh.org/preschool). Also, watch for the Blog of our preschool mascot, The Polar Bear, at <http://wcelc.blogspot.com/>.

- **YOU WILL NEED TO MAKE A DEPOSIT OF \$165.50 TO RESERVE A SPOT. YOU CAN BRING IN OR MAIL EXACT CASH OR CHECK TO THE PRESCHOOL.**
- **TUITION IS \$150 A MONTH AND IS DUE ON THE 1<sup>ST</sup>**
- **ALL PEERS MUST BE POTTY TRAINED.**
- **YOU WILL NEED TO PROVIDE YOUR OWN TRANSPORTATION. BUS TRANSPORTATION IS NOT AVAILABLE TO PEERS.**

***Potential Peer Model Link:***

**[CLICK HERE](https://forms.gle/ij9KoXS4EquM2tu67)**

**Or copy and paste this link in your browser:**

**<https://forms.gle/ij9KoXS4EquM2tu67>**

**We will contact you via the email you provide once we know if we are accepting peer role models in the program for the 2021/22 school year.**

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Westerville City Schools Early Learning Center  
936 Eastwind Drive | Westerville, OH 43081 | 614-797-7450

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