

Highlands School District ■

Pre-K Counts Family Handbook



MISSION

"To enable all students to succeed in a changing world."

CORE VALUES

Respectful

Accountable

Motivated

Safe

Program Location:

Highlands Early Childhood Center

1060 Atlantic Avenue

Brackenridge, PA 15014

724-226-2400, Ext. 1600

Rev 7/30/2024

Highlands School District Pre-K Counts Family Handbook

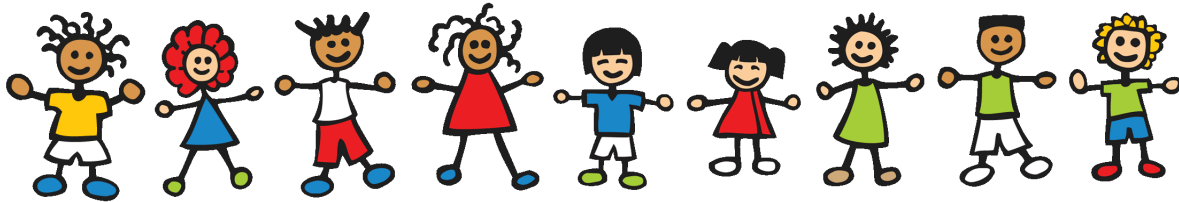
Table of Contents

Introduction/Non-Discrimination Statement	Page 3
History of Pre-K Counts	Page 4
Mission and Program Goals	Page 5
Grant and District Policies Requirements	Page 5
Curriculum	Page 6
Enrollment	Page 7
Attendance	Page 7
Tardiness and Late Departures	Page 8
Highlands School District Attendance Policy	Page 8
Daily Schedule	Page 9
School Health	Page 10
Safety	Page 11
Screening and Assessments	Page 13
Classroom Management	Page 14
Parent Communication and Involvement	Page 15
Parental Pre-K Rights and Responsibilities	Page 16
Signature Pages	Pages 18 – 19

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to provide Pre-K Counts parents with basic information about the Highlands Pre-K Counts program. This handbook should be used as a resource guide for questions about the program. Parents may also contact the Pre-K Counts teacher and/or the secretary at the Highlands Early Childhood Center, 724-226-2400, Ext. 1600.

The Pre-K Counts and Highlands Pre-K policies are designed so that you and your child can have an enjoyable and safe experience. Therefore, everyone is expected to adhere to these policies. Failure to do so may result in removal of your child from the program.



NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT FOR CACFP

The Highlands School District is an equal opportunity education institution, and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and/or handicap, age, in its required admissions procedures, educational programs, services, activities or employment practices, as required by Title VI, Title IX and Section 504, and/or any applicable federal statute.

The Highlands School District will assist students who have Limited English Proficiency to participate in all programs, services, and activities.

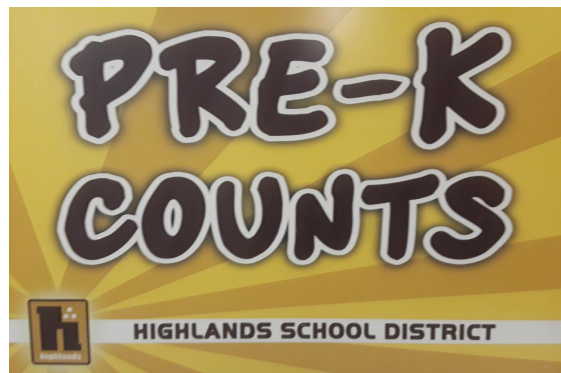
For information regarding civil rights, admissions, grievance procedures, bilingual education, and accessibility of programs, services, activities, and facilities that are usable by handicapped persons, please contact the building principal at Highlands Early Childhood Center at 724-226-2400, Ext. 1605.

HISTORY OF PRE-K COUNTS

The Pre-K Counts program is a state funded grant written by OCDEL (Office of Child Development of Early Learning). OCDEL was founded in 2007 when it was enacted into Law by Act 45. The goal of OCDEL and the grant is to create opportunities for the Commonwealth's youngest at-risk children, to develop and learn to their fullest potential. Pre-K providers must apply for the grant and be accepted.

Research about brain development and how young children learn confirms that all children can tap into their innate potential to learn when they receive high quality instruction. Early childhood education is a proven strategy that ensures a child's readiness for school and educational success. The state of Pennsylvania is committed to ensuring that all children begin school ready to learn and to become lifelong learners.

Early childhood education through the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program can open the doors of opportunity for every child to do well in school, in the workforce and in life.



HISTORY OF HIGHLANDS PRE-K COUNTS

The Highlands Pre-K Counts program started in 2007. Previously, Highlands also had a district-funded half-day program called K-4. In 2011, K-4 was eliminated, and Highlands had two half-day Pre-K Counts classes. In 2018, OCDEL awarded Highlands additional funding to increase our Pre-K Counts classes. Today, the program is located at Highlands Early Childhood Center, and includes two half-day classes and two full-day classes that serve up to 68 children.

PRE-K COUNTS MISSION & PROGRAM GOALS

The Pre-K Program mission is to provide high-quality, comprehensive education to all enrolled Pre-K Counts children. By forming a partnership with parents, staff and community members, we can offer services designed to promote a healthy, safe environment in which children, families, and staff can thrive and reach their full potential.

Goals:

A. Positive Self-Esteem

1. Respecting children and families with communication and acceptance
2. Encouraging and welcoming families to engage with the program
3. Assisting families to obtain community resources and information
4. Assisting families with Kindergarten readiness and transition

B. School Readiness

1. Developing the whole child
2. Aligning curriculum with Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards
3. Incorporating individual learning strategies for student success
4. Encouraging curiosity and imagination within the classroom environment

C. Future School and Life Success

1. Providing strong role models
2. Assisting parents as advocates for their child
3. Providing positive classroom environments

GRANT AND DISTRICT REQUIREMENTS

The Pre-K Counts grant contains required guidelines, including income levels, curriculum quality, staff credentials, attendance policies, instructional materials and program operation procedures. In addition to grant requirements, the program provider may have additional guidelines. The Highlands Pre-K Counts program has the following additional requirements:

- 1 Parents/guardians must provide accurate information upon registering.
- 2 Pre-K students will follow the Highlands School District Attendance Policy.

PRE-K COUNTS CURRICULUM

In addition to managing the Pre-K Counts grant process, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) also approves the use of appropriate, high quality curriculums.

The Highlands Pre-K program uses The Frogstreet Curriculum as its educational platform. The Frogstreet program emphasizes language arts, math, social studies, science, social skills, music, art and physical education. Our program also incorporates Heggerty to address phonemic awareness. The Second Step Social and Empathy Skills Program, which helps children develop socially and emotionally, is also included. It teaches strategies on how to get along with others with daily life, emotions and feelings.

These programs of study are aligned with the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards (Infant-2nd grade) and the Pennsylvania CORE Standards. They provide the foundation of information for what children should know and be able to do. This foundation is established upon a continuum that extends to high school.



ENROLLMENT

The following criteria are required for enrollment in the Highlands Pre-K Counts program:

Total household income may not exceed the following Federal Income Guidelines.

<u>Household/Family Size</u>	<u>Annual Income</u>	<u>Monthly Income</u>
1	45,180	3,765
2	61,320	5,110
3	77,460	6,455
4	93,600	7,800
5	109,740	9,145
6	125,880	10,490
7	142,020	11,835
8	158,160	13,180
Each Additional	16,140	1,345

Child must be 4 years old by September 1st. We may enroll 3 year olds that are 3 years old by September 1st. When necessary, children are selected through a prioritization strategy process. Families will be notified of enrollment in June.

COMPLETE enrollment packet including: proof of age, proof of residency, student immunization records, Pre-K Counts Income Verification Form, Zero Income Letter (if applicable) and income verification.

If a child has an IEP/IFSP already in place, a copy of the IEP should be provided at the time of enrollment.

ATTENDANCE

Pre-K Counts students are expected to attend school each day. Our program is 5 days a week and **follows the district calendar**.

Half day (12:10 pm dismissal) for the 2024-2025 school year:

September 13: AM Pre-K ONLY in session; NO PM Pre-K session

November 27: AM Pre-K ONLY in session; NO PM Pre-K session
December 23: PM Pre-K ONLY in session (in the morning)
January 24: PM Pre-K ONLY in session (in the morning)
June 6: AM Pre-K ONLY in session; NO PM Pre-K session

Student attendance is MANDATORY to participate in this program. Attendance is taken upon arrival. We ask that you provide an excuse if your child will not be attending that particular day. As a state regulated program, we are required to report attendance on an ongoing basis. We understand that sometimes your child may be ill, but we ask that you commit to the following:

- Child arrives ON TIME and if they are picked up, you do so on time.
- Schedule doctor appointments before or after school. If you have an appointment and arrive late, please provide a doctor's excuse.
- When an absence occurs, provide an excuse upon return, including the date and reason for absence.
- Follow the Highlands School District Attendance Policy (see the next page).
- If you plan a vacation or have a family situation, you must complete a form ahead of time (1 week) prior to the absence for approval. Not all requests will be honored.

Examples of excused absences include: illness, hospitalization, incapacitated due to serious injury, ongoing health related ailments which temporarily prevents attending, a death in the family, and approved family events and situations.

Illnesses that may keep your child home from school include: persistent cough or difficulty breathing, vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, unusual skin eruptions or rashes, redness and/or drainage from the eyes (pink eye) or a fever (100.4 degrees or higher). The student's temperature should remain normal for 24 hours after a fever, free of medication, before returning to school.

In the event that your child reaches 10 unexcused absences, removal from the program may occur. We will make every effort to collaborate with the family and aid in attendance improvement while helping to remove any barriers. You may submit excuses via hard copy or the following email link: HECCattendance@goldenrams.com

HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT ATTENDANCE POLICY

Parents should review the school's attendance policy, which is listed on the district website at www.goldenrams.com/domain/732.



DAILY SCHEDULE

A consistent routine is essential in developing school readiness habits to fully benefit from our Pre-K Counts program. Tardiness and/or early departures or pick-up times will not be accepted. We understand that emergencies may happen. However, if the child continually arrives late or is being picked up late, they may be removed from the program.

For **full day Pre-K Counts** students, the school day begins at 8:55 a.m. and ends at 3:40 p.m.

For **A.M. Pre-K Counts** students, the school day begins at 8:55 a.m. and ends at 11:30 a.m.

For **P.M. Pre-K Counts** students, the school day begins at 1:05 p.m. and ends at 3:40 p.m.

Arrival
Breakfast/Lunch
Morning Message / Calendar
Special (Full day ONLY)
Guided Instruction (Lesson)
Small Group Time (Centers)
Choice Time (Play and Discovery)
Gross Motor Time (Physical Education)
Dismissal

It is imperative that children arrive at school on time. Parents must be on time to pick up their child at the end of the program day.

SCHOOL HEALTH

Health services are an important part of our school system. During school hours, health services including first aid, administration of medications, notifying the parent of illness or injury, mandated health screenings, maintaining health records and providing health education and/or information will be provided.

Illness or Injury During School

Students who become ill or injured during school hours will be sent to the nurse's office. The nurse will evaluate the student and provide care according to the Highlands School District Health Procedures. The parent/guardian will be contacted if the condition requires outside medical attention or the student must be sent home.

Immunizations

Federal, state, and local guidelines require that children be properly immunized and have periodical physical examinations. Children in Pre-K Counts programs must have a current health assessment form on file within 45 days of enrollment. If your child is diagnosed with a disability, they must have a health assessment on file prior to starting our Pre-K Counts program. Parents/Guardians will be given a health assessment form for the child's physician to complete. Immunization records must be provided with a full health assessment and history.

Hand Washing

Parents, children, and staff are encouraged to wash hands upon arrival to school each day. This is an important step in helping to reduce the spread of germs and illness in our program. They should be washing the front and back of hands and in between fingers. Hands should also be washed before meal times, after using the restroom, if they cough or sneeze in their hands and if they have their fingers in their mouth. Teach children to sing the entire ABC song while washing their hands.

Personal Hygiene/Illness Prevention

Good hygiene practices should be modeled and followed by parents, children and staff. Universal precautions are followed in all Pre-K Counts classrooms. If your child has soiled clothes, they will be sent home in a bag. Toys and materials are cleaned regularly to prevent the spread of germs. These practices are based on prevention guidelines provided by the Pennsylvania Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics.

Nutrition

The Pre-K Counts program offers a meal, either breakfast or lunch, to all enrolled students at no cost. All meals meet the nutritional guidelines established by the United States Department of Agriculture. If a child has a food allergy and/or sensitivity, you must provide that information in writing so that we have it on file. Students are permitted to bring their own food for either meal time. We encourage nutritious foods and request that you refrain from sending soda pop and candy.

SAFETY

All school building doors are locked for student and staff safety and security. Highlands schools have implemented the Raptor Identification System, located in each school office. All visitors are required to report to the school office upon entering the building and must provide a valid driver's license or other government issued identification. School personnel will run their card through the Raptor System. Approved visitors will be given a temporary badge and will be able to proceed into the school. Individuals who need to drop off or pick up materials in the school vestibule will not have to use the Raptor System. If you are picking up or dropping your child off from an appointment, you are to stay in the vestibule. School employees are required to enforce these regulations.

Drills

Every month, each school in the Highlands School District will conduct a fire drill. During a drill, all staff and students will be evacuated from the building and remain at a safe distance until all students and staff are accounted for. In addition to fire drills, we conduct a severe weather drill, an evacuation drill, and a lock down drill.

Weather/Emergency Information

Sometimes it is necessary to delay starting times, cancel school, or to dismiss students early due to weather or emergencies. The decision is based solely on the safety and welfare of students and staff. If you are not normally home at times when these scenarios may occur, you should make arrangements at the start of the school year to ensure that your child is safe and supervised. The following policies are in place for these situations:

1. Announcement of school emergencies, delays, and early dismissals will be communicated by School Messenger automated phone system, the district's mobile app, Facebook, Twitter, our district website www.goldenrams.com and local radio and television stations.
2. Early dismissals will only be ordered when absolutely necessary.
3. On a 2-hour delay, bus pick up and school start time will be adjusted. Both the Morning and afternoon sessions will be held, but on a modified schedule. All Families will be given a 2-hour delay schedule at the beginning of the school year.
4. **PLEASE DO NOT CALL THE SCHOOL DURING THESE SITUATIONS.** Additional information during an emergency will be broadcast, if necessary.

***Please note that the effectiveness of the School Messenger automated phone system depends on accurate contact information that you provide the school. If your information changes during the school year, you must notify your school 724-226-2400, Ext. 1600.**

Releasing Your Child

A student will be released only to the parent/guardian or person designated on the registration form. The person authorized to pick up must be at least 18 years. A valid picture ID must be presented to ensure safety and security of our students. If you bring your child to school late or pick them up early, you will have to sign your child in and/or out.

Child Abuse

All school employees are mandated reporters. They have been trained in procedures for reporting abuse and neglect and are required by law to report. Whenever there is a reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, school personnel are required to report these cases to county and state agencies. These agencies have the legal right to interview students at school without parental consent.

Custody and Protection from Abuse Orders

It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to notify the school principal and teacher of the circumstances regarding custody of a child, and to provide proper legal documentation. The following policies are in place regarding custody and legal matters:

1. When a court establishes custody, the school-parent relationship will be maintained consistent with the decision of the court.
2. When custody is not formally established, the school will presume the parent with whom the child resides is responsible for reports, excuse forms, and authorization of any deviation from the routine transportation arrangements for the child. The non-custodial parent/guardian may receive progress reports and/or review the child's permanent record by contacting the building principal.
3. If a parent/guardian has legal custody, they have the right for the child to be released to them, unless written documentation is provided that they are not authorized to do so.

Confidentiality and Release of Information

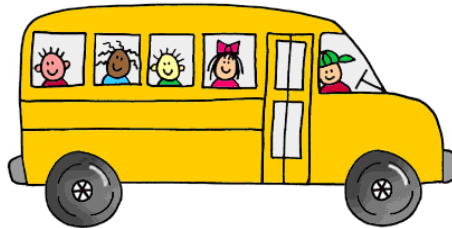
Student information, medical and academic records are only shared with school district personnel directly involved with the child's education. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of April 2003, prevents medical offices from sending forms and medical information to the school. It is the parent's responsibility to provide information to the school.

Due to current federal privacy laws, parents have discretion and responsibility to share medical information with their child's teacher, and/or the bus driver. School personnel are not permitted to release information without the written consent of the parent.

Media Procedure

The Highlands School District will allow a student's image, verbal, or written comments, and school work to appear in various multimedia outlets, including newspaper features, television and radio broadcasts, district newsletters, publications, promotional videos, the district's website, and official district social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) unless the student's parent/guardian submits written objection. At no time will the district ever display personal information such as full address, phone number and/or any confidential information.

A parent/guardian may object to the use of their child's image, comments, or work appearing in any form of media by informing the child's principal in writing within the first 30 days of the school year. If a written objection is not received, silence will serve as implied consent. If you have any questions, please contact Communications Coordinator, Jennifer Goldberg, at 724-226-2400, Ext. 5640.



SCREENING AND ASSESSMENTS

Developmental Screenings

The Pre-K Counts grant requires screening within the first 45 days of school. The Ages and Stages Questionnaires are the tools used to gather this developmental information. If a child demonstrates delays in any area, the Pre-K teacher will contact the early intervention agency through the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. The Early Intervention Program provides support to students in the Pre-K Counts classroom. The program will further evaluate the child and determine whether they qualify for additional support services.

At the end of the year, Pre-K Counts children will be screened for Kindergarten readiness by the Pre-K teacher and a Highlands School District. Screening results will be shared with parents to identify the child's strengths and areas of need. Our Pre-K Counts program works with the Kindergarten program to provide a smooth transition for students and parents/guardians. The transition program includes: meeting the Kindergarten staff, discussing routines, and curriculum, visiting Kindergarten classrooms and reading books about going to Kindergarten.



Assessments

Pre-K Counts students are assessed daily through observation, student work, review and performance. In addition, teachers assess quarterly through the AIM Observational Tool. The Pre-K Counts grant also requires assessment results to be shared with families. This will be communicated quarterly and during parent teacher conferences held in November. In addition, a Highlands Pre-K Counts report card will be shared every 9 weeks. These assessment tools provide information about skill progress regarding the following skills: social, emotional, work habits, motor, communication, and academic performance.

You will have an opportunity to meet with your child's Pre-K Counts teacher in November at parent/teacher conferences to discuss your child's development and performance. Parents can also discuss setting goals and plans to help ensure success in school. Parents/guardians should make every effort to attend these conferences. Working closely with your child's teacher will help build a positive relationship that will benefit your child's education.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Positive Behavior Interventions and Support Program (PBIS)

Highlands School District uses the PBIS program. Our goal is to develop self-discipline so that your child can make good choices that result in appropriate behavior. This program includes:

- Establishing rules that encourage respect for self, others and the environment.
- Being positive role models.
- Teaching techniques on how to set personal limits and boundaries.
- Using positive reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior.
- Supporting families to have consistency between home and school.

Should a child's behavior require more intensive support, it is important that you work with the school staff. The following procedure will take place if this situation occurs:

- The Pre-K Counts teacher will contact parents if a pattern of inappropriate behavior occurs or a severe inappropriate behavior occurs.
- If inappropriate behavior continues, there will be a conference with parent, teacher and the principal/Pre-K Counts Supervisor (Dr. Russo).
- In the rare case that the team determines that, despite the supports, the situation cannot be resolved, the child may be removed from the program. This decision will be in the best interest of safety for the child and/or other children in the classroom.

Classroom Rules

Each Pre-K Counts classroom will develop a set of rules aligned to the expectations and consequences of our PBIS Program. The teacher will share their rules with you and explain the clip chart on the first day of school. Please discuss these rules and expectations with your child. If inappropriate behavior becomes a pattern, the teacher will contact you to discuss solutions. If the behavior continues, a meeting with the teacher and principal may be necessary.

PARENT COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Communication

An important part of the child's learning experience is parental involvement with our program. Understanding of the program and cooperation with policies are essential to your child's experience and the smooth operation of the program.

All students will bring home a take-home folder each day. Every attempt should be made to review the information that is sent home, including the work that your child is doing in our program. Newsletters from the district, building, and classroom teacher will come home as well. Staff may be contacted via phone or email, which will be given to you on the first day of school.

If you have a concern or questions, please feel free to contact the teacher. If they cannot resolve the issue, they will bring the concerns to the appropriate staff or principal.

Parents will be asked to complete a Highlands Pre-K Counts Survey at the end of the year. Your feedback is essential in helping us to provide the most effective experience for the preschool aged children in this community.

Volunteering

Parents/guardians are welcomed during regular school hours of operation. Confidentiality and safety issues limit visitors from staying for prolonged periods of time. Volunteers field

trips must have criminal, child abuse, and FBI clearances. Information about how to obtain these documents is available on the Highlands School District website at www.goldenrams.com/volunteer.

Parents/guardians who cannot physically volunteer are encouraged to get involved with our program. You can share your talents, culture, and interests with the children. Working with your child at home is another great way that you can stay involved with our program.



- To be welcomed in the program
- To be treated as a partner in my child's education
- To be informed about my child's progress on a regular basis
- To be able to learn about the operation of the program
- To expect support for my child to grow and develop
- To be able to volunteer and get involved with the program

PRE-K COUNTS PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- To accept Pre-K Counts as an opportunity which can improve my child's life
- To learn as much as possible about the Pre-K Counts program
- To work with the staff and other parents in a cooperative way
- To embrace the opportunities that will help my child be successful

- To provide loving and protective guidance for my child
- To promote and educate others about the program
- To work with my child on skills and program activities
- To attend and get involved in program opportunities and activities

Pre-K Counts

Family Handbook

Signature Page

Please sign and return this page to your child's teacher.

I have read and agree to support the policies in this Handbook so that my child can learn and grow in his/her Pre-K Counts experience.

Printed Parent/Guardian Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

***Parent Copy. Please keep this for your records.**

Pre-K Counts

Family Handbook Signature Page

Please sign and return this page to your child's teacher.

I have read and agree to support the policies in this Handbook so that my child can learn and grow in his/her Pre-K Counts experience.

Printed Parent/Guardian Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

***School Copy. Please sign and return this to your child's teacher.**