

# **Hebron Preschool Study**



**2018-2019**

## **Introduction**

The Hebron Public Schools currently offers three full-day preschool classes and two half-day classes for children who reside in Hebron. To further explore the current program and the needs of the community, the Hebron Board of Education requested a Preschool Study be conducted.

In October, a Preschool Study Team was developed, which included community members, parents, Hebron Board of Selectmen, Hebron Public Schools, and an independent facilitator. The following members contributed to the Preschool Study:

Timothy Van Tassel, Superintendent  
Donald Briere, Director of Educational Services  
Katie Uriano, Gilead Hill School Principal  
Gail Richmond, Vice Chairmen of Board of Selectmen  
Donna Lanza, Director of Administrative Services  
Heather Petit, Board of Education  
Christopher Lapsis, School Readiness Teacher  
Rachel Thayer, Preschool Teacher  
Kara Lee Aubrey, Preschool Teacher  
Margaret Ellsworth, Preschool Teacher  
Richard Gadoury, Parks and Recreation  
Dan Smith, Parent  
Shannon Congdon, Parent  
Judith Podell, Community Member  
Kellie Sheridan, Independent Facilitator

From October 2018 to January 2019, the Preschool Study Team researched and discussed the history of the Hebron Preschool program, the benefits of a preschool experience, best practices, and developed program recommendations. The following study questions were provided from the Hebron Board of Education to guide the Team's research:

- What is the historical perspective of the Hebron Preschool Program, as well as community history related to preschool?

- Why should we have preschool? What are the outcomes of children who attend preschool?
- What defines a successful preschool program?
- What does the community want in a preschool program?
- How should the Hebron Preschool Program be funded?

In addition to research and discussion, the Preschool Study Team developed and administered a Preschool Community Survey to collect information related to the major study questions. The Preschool Community Survey was advertised in the local newspaper and online (i.e., Hebron Town website, Hebron Public Schools website). The Survey could be completed electronically or in hard copy -- paper copies were distributed across the community (i.e., Douglas Library, Hebron Senior Center, Hebron Town Hall). The Team reviewed the survey data in addition to available research to inform the Team's recommendations to the Board of Education. The Preschool Study Team also contributed to the completion of the final report and presentation.

The following narrative will provide an overview of the efforts of the Preschool Study Team. The narrative is divided into the following sections: Program History, Benefits of a Preschool Experience, Best Practices for a Successful Program, Community Input Related to Preschool Programming, Program Funding, and Recommendations. In addition to this report, the Preschool Study Team presented findings to the Hebron Board of Education on Thursday, February 14, 2019.

## **Program History**

Upon review of Hebron Preschool Program, the Team considered program history dating back to 1999. At this time, the focus of the program was on students with Individualized

Education Programs (IEPs). Three and four year-olds were in separate classes; three year-olds attended a half-day program three mornings per week and four year-olds attended a half-day program five afternoons per week. Preschool was tuition-free for all accepted residents the until School Readiness grant was awarded in 2012.

In 2000, classes shifted to multi-age, half-day and were offered four days per week. By 2001, peer models were six per class; the ratio was a minimum of 1:1 (i.e., peer model : student with an IEP) and the recommended class size was twelve students. Each year, classes began with six peer models and any known students with IEPs. A lottery system was used to select peer models. Remaining spots were reserved for incoming students with Special Education needs. During years when the number of students with identified needs increased beyond six per class, additional classes were added mid-year.

In 2012, the district was awarded the School Readiness grant, which provided eighteen additional slots for income eligible families. As a requirement of the School Readiness grant, Hebron Public School's entire program worked to become accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). All Hebron community preschool programs were invited to become NAEYC accredited; however, none of the community programs pursued this option at the time. The Hebron Preschool Program gained NAEYC accreditation in 2015. As a result of demand, an additional full-day class was added in 2015, which charged tuition. By 2016, with the School Readiness grant, the preschool program expanded to three full-day programs and two half-day programs (one AM/one PM). Currently, all full-day slots and half-day slots are tuition-based, with exception to students with IEPs and families eligible for reduced tuition based on income.

## **Benefits of a Preschool Experience**

The Preschool Study Team spent a significant amount of time discussing research related to the benefits of a preschool experience. Team members were asked to contribute relevant research to our shared Google platform, which allowed members to review research outside scheduled meetings. Throughout this process, the group was able to engage in meaningful research-based discussion, which contributed to our final recommendations.

The research examined by the Team highlighted the following benefits of a preschool experience:

- Provides fundamental learning and supports students successful transition to Kindergarten
- Offers increased opportunities for socialization
- Emphasizes social-emotional learning and development (e.g., sitting cooperatively in a group, self-regulation, problem solving with peers, turn taking), which later subsequently aids academic learning
- Provides early intervention and supports to students experiencing academic and developmental challenges
- Increased and persistent gains on achievement test scores
- Fewer occurrences of grade retention and less likely to be identified for specialized services
- Increased high school graduation rates
- Decreased crime and delinquency rates  
(Barnett & Hustedt, 2003; Bouffard, 2017).

The Preschool Study Team also contacted Gilead Hill School's Kindergarten teachers to provide their perspective on students with a preschool experience, as opposed to those without.

The Kindergarten teachers provided the following insight based on their personal experience.

Students who have attended Preschool:

- Display better self-help skills (e.g., able to unpack, zip coat)
- Exhibit improved language skills
- Demonstrate increased social skills and more effective problem solving skills

- Exhibit less frequent tantrums
- Are more confident, as they are familiar with the building and staff
- Demonstrate more advanced reading and math readiness skills

Although the Preschool Study Team remained open to all perspectives, the available research and professional perspectives reviewed conclusively indicated noteworthy gains for students who experience Preschool from academic, social/emotional/behavioral, and developmental standpoints.

### **Best Practices for a Successful Program**

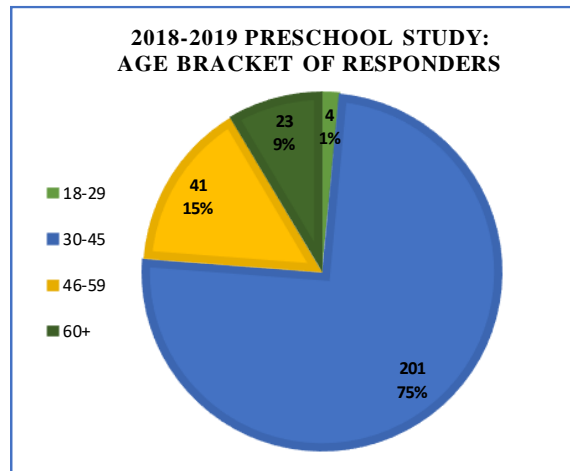
The Preschool Study Team also discussed research related to best practices for a successful, quality preschool program. The research examined by the Team highlighted the following best practices and components of a successful program:

- Highly qualified, certified teachers that receive ongoing professional development and learning opportunities
  - Adequate planning time and collaboration time for teachers
  - Social-emotional development opportunities for students
  - Investment in the implementation and sustainability of an evidence-based curriculum
  - Increased opportunities for early interventions and student supports
  - Building positive connections between teacher and student
  - Fostering positive connections between teacher and parent/guardian
  - Culturally responsive practices
- (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2019; NAEYC, 2019)

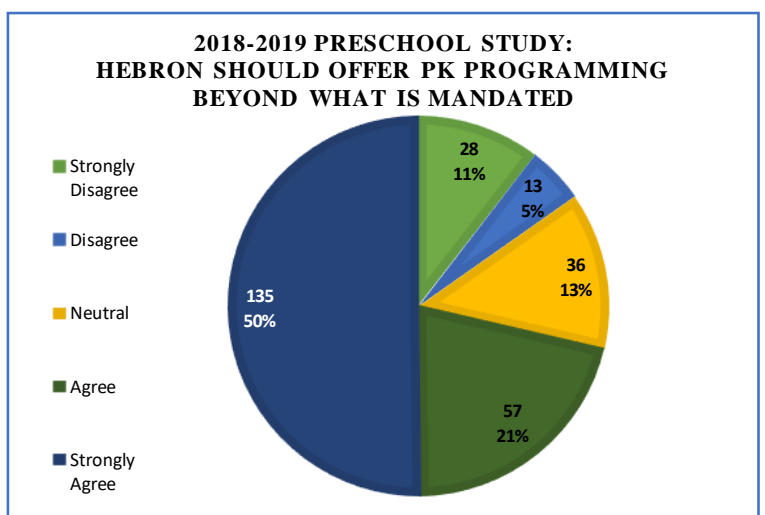
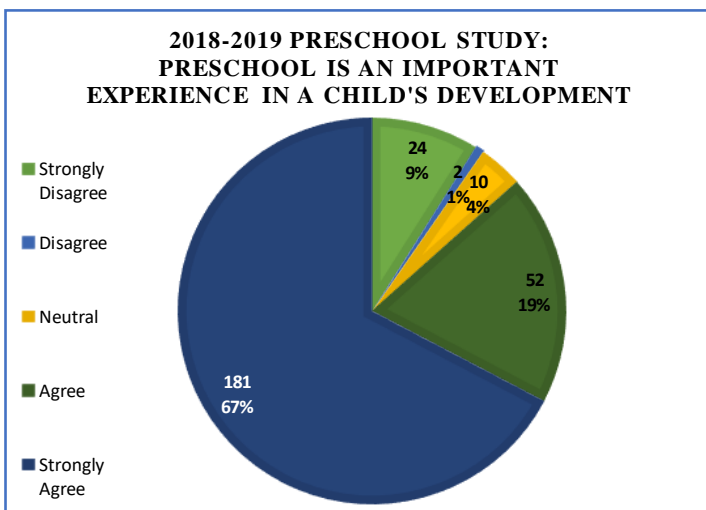
### **Community Input Related to Preschool Programming**

One of the major goals of the Preschool Study was to learn more about what the community needs in a preschool program. In order to gather community feedback and data, the Team developed and administered a Preschool Community Survey. The survey consisted of ten questions, which included demographic information and others related to the major study

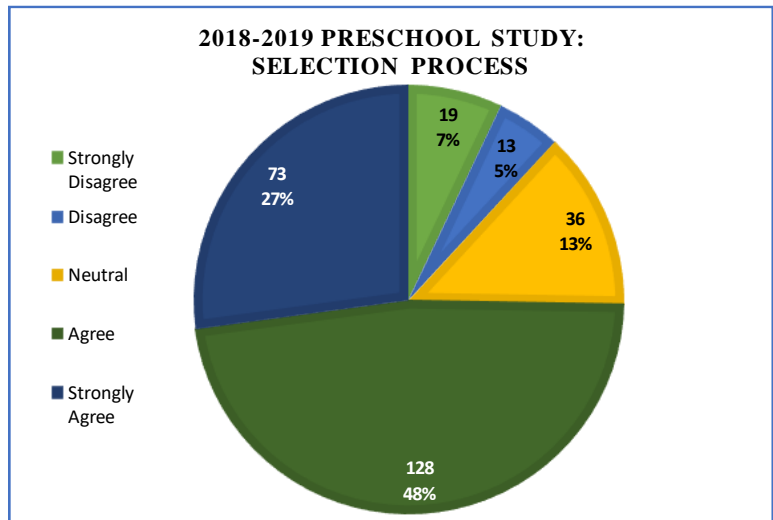
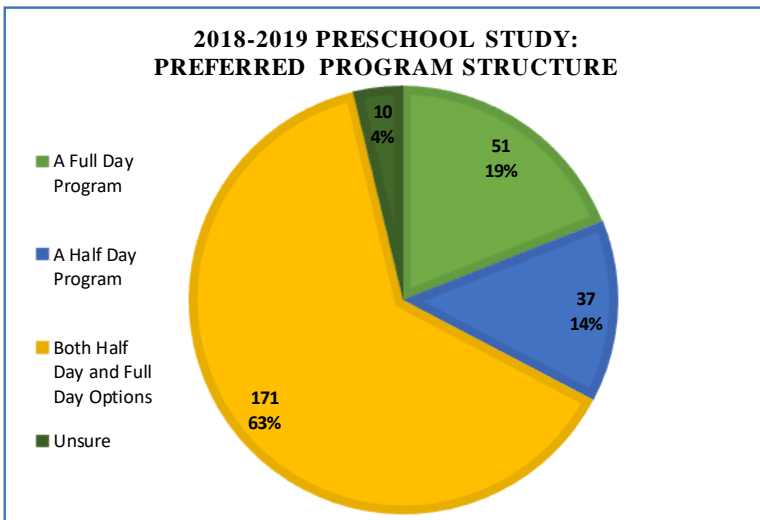
questions. The survey was available through the Hebron Board of Education website, Town of Hebron website and Facebook page, the River East Newspaper, the Douglas Library, and the Hebron Senior Center. In total, 269 survey responses were collected.



Survey responses indicated a high level of interest in preschool programming and favored towards Hebron Public School’s current program. The majority of respondents (86%) agreed or strongly agreed that a quality preschool experience is an important step in a child’s development. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) mandates that preschool be offered to children who qualify for special education services. The majority of respondents (71%) think the Hebron Board of Education should offer a program that extends beyond what is mandated.



In terms of program structure, the majority of respondents (64%) think the Hebron Public Schools should offer both half-day and full-day options to families. The majority of respondents (65%) agreed or strongly agreed that the size of the Hebron Public School’s Preschool Program should be large enough to accommodate all age eligible preschool children (i.e., 3 and 4 years old) in Hebron. However, if the Hebron Public School’s Preschool Program is unable to accommodate all age eligible preschool children, the majority of respondents (75%) think the current lottery system is a fair and equitable selection system.

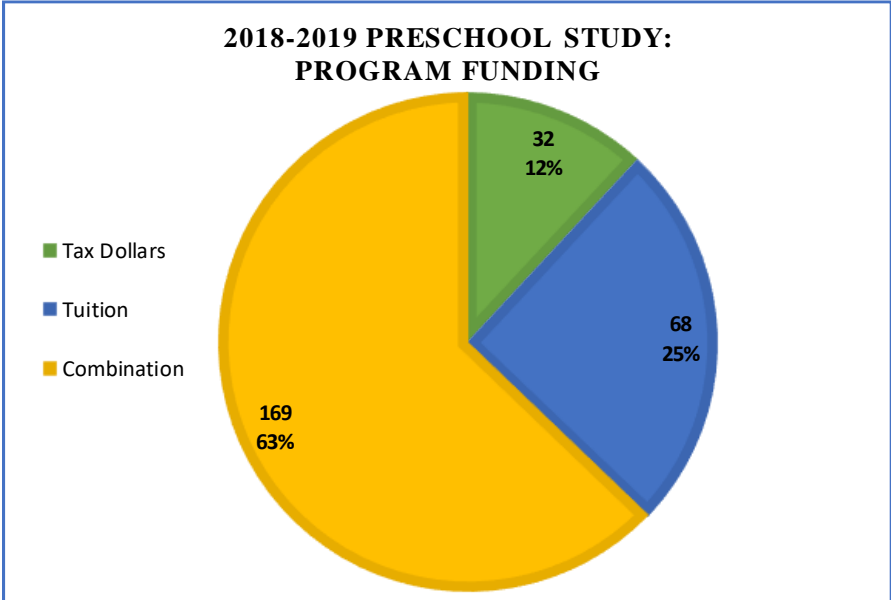


## Program Funding

Question 7 of the Preschool Community Survey asked, “I think the Hebron Public School’s Preschool Program should be funded through: tax dollars, tuition, or a combination of tax dollars and tuition.” Survey responses indicated that 63% thought the Preschool Program should be funded through a combination of tax dollars and tuition. This mirrors Hebron Public School’s current cost structure, which charges families \$600/month to attend the full-day Preschool Program and \$240/month to attend one of the two half-day Preschool Program classes.



Students with IEPs and/or families meeting income eligibility criteria receive programming at no-cost or a reduced rate, respectively. Current cost structures were based upon work completed in 2017 where districts from across the state were called and surveyed on their district’s tuition costs. At the time, districts within Hebron’s District Reference Group (DRG), geographic proximity, as well as Hebron community private preschool programs were prioritized for this work.



### Recommendations

Over the past five months, the Preschool Study Team has dedicated time to review the current preschool program, research evidence-based best practices, obtain community input related to preschool programming. When forming recommendations, the Team considered the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and challenges of each option in order to create a model for sustained improvement. As a result, the Team has prepared the recommendations found below. Please note, “Program Option 1” is considered the favored recommendation of the

Team; however, the Team did find value in providing a subsequent recommendation for Board consideration at this time as well.

### **Program Option 1: Current Program Structure Remains the Same**

The current preschool program is meeting the needs of the majority of students and families in Hebron. The current program also extends beyond the state mandate of providing a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students with identified special needs. Furthermore, structures are already in place to provide quality programming, such as: classrooms with bathrooms, outdoor space, access to specials, and certified teachers. The program offers full-time and part-time options to accommodate the specific needs of families. Another advantage of the current program is that it allows for more student-staff contact during classroom activities, outdoor time, meals, and specials. Expanding the program may lead to increased class sizes, which may reduce the rigor, and quality of the program.

The Team also identified some disadvantages to the current program structure. The current program does not meet the needs of all students and families, as there is a variable waitlist of students from year to year. Class sizes have expanded to meet the needs of students on the waitlist. The current structure also presents staffing challenges in terms of full-day coverage.

Based on feedback from current preschool teachers, opportunities to improve the current program include: common planning time for staff, increased time to communicate with parents, professional development for non-certified staff, and creating all classes the same size (physical space and number of students).

## **Program Option 2: Addition of Two, Part-Time (AM/PM) Classes to Current Program**

The addition of two, part-time classes to the current program may help address perceived inequity in the number of students served, as it will accommodate more students and reduce the waitlist. Although this structure would accommodate more students, it would require additional costs associated with adding a certified teacher and para, as well as furnishing another classroom. The school would have to identify an appropriate physical space with a bathroom within the existing building. Based on the current schedule, specials would be impacted and may not be possible. Parking and increased traffic during drop-off and pick-up is also an area of concern. On a community level, expanding the Gilead Hill Preschool Program would impact other community preschool programs.

The Preschool Study Team has come to the conclusion that the current program is successful in providing a quality preschool experience. Adding two additional part-time classes would allow more students and families to benefit from the program; however, comes with programmatic and community-based implications. The Team provides this report and its recommendations to the Hebron Board of Education for their considerations.

## References

- A High Quality Program for Your Preschooler. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*. Retrieved February 6, 2019, from <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/high-quality-program-for-preschooler>
- Bouffard, S. (2017). *Most Important Year: Pre: Kindergarten and the Future of Our Children*. Penguin Publishing Group.
- High-Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like. (n.d.). Retrieved February 6, 2019, from <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/high-quality-preschool-why-we-need-it-and-what-it-looks>)
- Research on Early Childhood Education. *National Education Association*. Retrieved February 6, 2019, from <http://www.nea.org/home/18226.htm>
- Sanchez, C. (2017, May 03). Pre-K: Decades Worth Of Studies, One Strong Message. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved February 6, 2019, from <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/05/03/524907739/pre-k-decades-worth-of-studies-one-strong-message>
- Smock, J. (2017, August 18). Why Kids Deserve a Preschool that Lets Them Play. *Washington Post*. Retrieved February 6, 2019, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/08/18/why-kids-deserve-a-preschool-that-lets-them-play/?utm\\_term=.de35cf96c644](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/08/18/why-kids-deserve-a-preschool-that-lets-them-play/?utm_term=.de35cf96c644)
- W.S., & Hustedt, J. T. (2003). Preschool: The most important grade. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*. Retrieved February 6, 2019, from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr03/vol60/num07/Preschool@-The-Most-Important-Grade.aspx>

Appendix A

<b>Hebron Area Program Research</b>						
	<b>When Program Opened</b>	<b>NAEYC Accredited</b>	<b>Tuition</b>	<b>Students in Program</b>	<b>Students on Waiting List</b>	<b>1/2 or Full Day Program</b>
<b>Christ Lutheran</b>	12 years ago	No	\$235.00 per week	14 11 are Hebron Residents	No	Full
<b>Hebron Discovery Zone</b>	5 years ago	No	\$228 per week \$70 per day	18 8 are Hebron Residents	No	Full or Part Time (part-time can pick days)
<b>KinderRHAMA</b>	13 years ago	No	\$2000.00 3 year program (2 days a week) \$3,590.00 4 year old program (3 days a week)	24 7 are Hebron Residents	No	4 year old program (3 days a week) 3 year old program (2 days a week)
<b>Columbia Discovery Zone</b>	17 years ago	No	\$228 per week \$70 per day	30 No Hebron Residents	No	Full or Part Time (part-time can pick days)
<b>Marlborough Discovery Zone</b>	14 years ago	No	\$228 per week \$70 per day	25 No Hebron Residents	No	Full or Part time (part-time can pick days)
<b>Marlborough Kids Klub</b>	20 years ago	No	Will call back with info	9 No Hebron Residents	No	½ day program Some stay in pm for daycare

*Updated 2017*

## Statewide Preschool Comparisons - Updated February, 2019

Program/School	Full Day	1/2 day	Cost	NAEYC	Transportation
Andover	yes	No	sliding fee scale, capped \$400/mo full day	yes	4yr old free
Bethany	no	3Yr/AM 3x 4yr old PM 4x	3yr \$1500/yr 1/2 day M-Th 4yr \$1750 1/2 M-F	no	special ed
Bolton	no	1 AM 1 PM	\$1,000/yr	no	special ed
Brookfield	no	yes	3-1/2 days \$2,7000/yr - 4 1/2 day \$3,600/yr	no	special ed
Cheshire	no	yes	3-1/2 days \$1,680/yr - 4 1/2 day \$2,200/yr	no	special ed
Colchester	yes	yes	free	no	yes
Columbia	yes	1 AM 1 PM 12 each	\$3,000/yr full \$1500/yr 1/2 day 5days	no	yes
Coventry	yes	yes	\$4,914/yr full day, \$2,912/yr 1/2day	yes	yes
East Hampton	yes	yes	free	no	special ed
Easton	yes	1-4 days/wk 9:00-1:30	5 day/wk- \$5,660/yr 4 day/wk \$4,530/yr	no	special ed.
Essex/Sharon Chester (Regional 4)	no	no	\$1,500/yr (3 days) \$2,200/yr (4days)	no	special ed
Fairfield	no	yes	4-1/2 day \$2,188.75/yr 5-1/2 day \$4377.50/yr	no	special ed
Farmington	yes	yes	1/2 day M-F \$4,100/yr	no	special ed
Glastonbury	no	1AM 1PM	\$1,000/yr	no	special ed
Granby	no	yes	1/2 day M-F \$1,714/yr	no	special ed
Greenwich	yes	yes	1/2 day 8:30-1:30- \$7,465/yr full day \$10,050/yr	no	special ed

Guilford	yes	yes	1/2 day 8:30-1:30- \$1800/yr/yr full day \$3600/yr	no	special ed
Mansfield	no	1 AM 1 PM 12 each	none	no	yes
Marlborough	yes	yes	\$4,500/yr M-Th full day	no	yes
New Fairfield	no	yes	1/2 day-\$3,000/yr	no	special ed
New Hartford	4 yr olds	3yr olds M-TH	3yr old \$1800/yr 4 yr old full day \$4500/yr	no	special ed
Newtown	no	yes	1/2 day-\$2,000/yr	no	special ed
Orange	no	yes	3hr program- \$3,250/yr	no	special ed
Pomfret	no	yes	\$225/mo full-1/2- free if qualify on sliding fee scale	no	yes
Redding	no	yes	4-5 yr old \$6220 M- F	no	special ed.
Regional 13	no	yes	free	no	special ed
Regional 14 Woodbridge	no	1 AM 1 PM 12 each	1/2 day- \$1500/yr	yes	special ed
Regional 17 Higganum	no	yes	1/2 day- \$1500/yr	yes	special ed
Regional 18 Center School	no	yes	Free	yes	special ed
Salem	no	yes	\$2,000/yr	no	special ed
Suffield	no	1 AM 1 PM	\$1,500/yr	no	special ed
Tolland	no	yes	sliding fee scale, max what scale says current \$60/wk	no	special ed
Wilton	no	yes	9:00-1:15 M-F \$7,000	no	special ed