



A SCHOOL DAY IN

3PK & 4PK AT AACPS

by The Office of Early Childhood



This past school year launched the exciting opportunity for some families to enroll in the 3-Year-Old Prekindergarten (3PK) program with Anne Arundel County Public Schools. This year, AACPS offered 8 full-day 3PK programs for students who met MSDE's qualifying guidelines. These full-day 3-Year-Old programs offer qualifying families the opportunity for free high quality prekindergarten, breakfast and lunch, as well as receiving developmentally appropriate education in math, literacy, and social foundations. 3PK school day includes a rest period for the students and Ferndale's Early Education Center's (FEEC) Principal, Faidley believes that, "The 3PK program is outstanding! Students engage in play-based exploration and learning experiences that integrate learning, fun and imagination. Students gain many skills as they begin to develop independence and confidence in their abilities. The 3PK program provides the foundational skills in academics, social emotional learning, oral

language and the fine motor development needed to prepare students for 4PK."

In addition to adding 3PK, AACPS made the decision to convert 18 4-Year-Old half day prekindergarten (4PK) programs into full-day programs to comply with Maryland's Blueprint for the Future. The 108 4PK programs are designed to improve the school readiness of children who meet MSDE's qualifying guidelines. If seats remain, schools may enroll other applicants. These prekindergarten programs offer a high-quality educational experience to eligible children in order to prepare them with the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for school success in kindergarten and beyond.

With registration for the 2023-2024 occurring, adults of eligible students might find it helpful to learn more about the 3PK & 4PK school day. AACPS was invited out to Ferndale Early Education Center (FEEC) to highlight these programs.





As FEEC 3 and 4-Year-Old students arrived for the day, they are greeted by the entryway into the school. The students go down the hall, are greeted by their teacher and unpack for the day. As the students ate their breakfast, music was playing and students talked with one another. As students finished eating, they had the choice of looking at books, building puzzles, or playing with farm counters. Once announcements finished, they came to the carpet to answer the question of the day which was a component of their community building circle. Then the students listened to a read aloud and answered questions related to the story. Every so often, the students turned and talked to one another and shared their feelings about the story (see *image top left*).

After the story, the teacher modeled writing a sentence related to the story and drew a picture to match the sentence. The students went to the table and drew pictures about the story and wrote letter-like shapes to communicate their sentence. While writing, quiet music played in the background to create an author-like environment.

The students talked to their peers at the table while drawing and writing and even commented on one another's pictures.

After writing, the students went to small group literacy and centers.

Some students were being instructed by the teacher who was teaching the names of letters, the sound they represent and how to correctly write the letters. Some groups were making letters with playdough and others were writing the letters in sand trays.

The students that were not with the teacher were at centers and some students were looking at books independently in their "boat" (see *image top right*). Other students were playing at the light table and matching letters of the alphabet (see *image to the right*).

Dense Faidley stated, "The 3PK and 4PK curriculum provides developmentally appropriate instruction centered around themes and Maryland standards. Students engage in play-based learning in a fun, energetic and family-oriented environment. Our staff are knowledgeable about early education and passionate about working with children ages 3-5. Students interact in learning experiences which prepare them to have a successful start in Kindergarten and beyond. They learn social and emotional awareness, develop positive relationships as they learn how to work together, play and



have fun. Ferndale is truly a hidden gem as staff make magic happen every day!"

After small group literacy, 3PK and 4PK students attended cultural arts, lunch, and went to recess. Just as K-5 students, depending on the day of the week, students go to either: physical education, music, art, media or EEE. Participating in these routines at a young age helps develop their readiness for kindergarten by exposing them to transitions, routines, listening to other adults and helps them develop into a well rounded member of society.



In the afternoon, 3PK and 4PK students participated in mathematic lessons. The lesson launched with students talking about math in their world by looking at pictures. Students counted objects and made sets using apple counters. Then the students broke into small group instruction and the teacher and assistant pulled students to their tables. Some students sorted materials by color, another group made sets to a given number and the last group added objects on "lily pads" (see images above). If students were not working with an adult, they were playing independently at a center. Independent play time allows students to build social emotional skills, develop language, learn how to handle conflict and connect with their peers.

The school day ends with free play which enhances students social, emotional, and cognitive development. The 3PK and 4PK programs provide multiple opportunities for play because it helps students develop emotional regulation and creates opportunities to teach students to create and resolve uncertainty. This learning block fosters social-emotional skills and a growth mindset.

3PK and 4PK programs also benefits families. The program collaborates and partners with families throughout the year as they learn about county and school policies. Families have the opportunity to participate in an orientation and tour the school at the start of the year. There are opportunities throughout the school year for parents to attend parent/teacher conferences which can be in-person or virtual. AACPS has a Family Handbook that shares guidelines, practices and policies. "I believe that FEEC really tries to create a school community. The teachers send postcards from the teachers to students. We have quarterly Chat n' Chews on various topics. We ask families to participate in our Family Survey three times a year to provide us with feedback. I communicate regularly using Connect-Ed with monthly newsletters, texts and emails. We provide translated documents in Spanish for all communication. We hold two Family Nights (literacy and math) a year, and we do many fun events and experiences with students throughout the school year. Parents are invited in for Student of the Month lunch and other special days that highlight their child or their learning," says Principal Faidley.

The PK programs connect math, science, literacy, and social-emotional learning together and Mrs. May at Ferndale says that, "The new curriculum has been a rewarding way to do project based learning with our students. It has been amazing to see each classroom create something for each unit. Our students created an under the sea mural, classroom museum, and garden mural. The students take pride in what they have learned by being able to creatively showcase their learning for their families and friends. We even connected our learning to real life experiences by taking a field trip to a museum! Students have daily, systematic instruction on phonological awareness skills. These skills will be used as a foundation for reading and writing. We have seen our school wide data improve because of the new curriculum."

These programs aim to prepare AACPS's 3 and 4-year-olds to have the foundational skills needed for success in school, career and life. Prek often is a family's first introduction to the school and its community so a goal of the program is to build a strong foundation for future school years. Visit <https://www.aacps.org/Page/1115> to learn more about AACPS's 3PK and 4PK offerings and locations.