

The Benefits of Attending a Public School Run and Supported Preschool Sited in a Vermont Elementary School

Who I Am

Hello! My name is Rob Reade and I am currently the teacher/director of the Samuel Morey preschool which is located in a classroom in the Samuel Morey Elementary School in Fairlee, Vermont. I have a Master's Degree in Special Education and I hold Vermont educator endorsements in the areas of Early Childhood Educator, Reading/English Language Arts Specialist and Special Educator.

I have been teaching for about thirty years. My work experiences have included (in chronological order): vocational teacher for high school students and adults; special educator for middle school and high school students; special educator for kindergarten through sixth grade students; elementary level literacy learning specialist; kindergarten literacy learning specialist; teacher trainer and consultant in early literacy practices for early educators and childcare providers; preschool special needs teacher and co-teacher; and preschool classroom teacher.

A Unique Perspective

For the past fifteen years I have worked exclusively with children on the preschool level - including five years as a special needs teacher and co-teaching "partner" in privately run programs and, for the past ten years, as a preschool classroom teacher. (My wife has also been a preschool level educator for the past twenty years.)

I believe that my substantial experiences as an educator in both public school run preschools and privately run programs give me a unique perspective as to the nature of educational opportunities that are being offered to young learners in each of these settings.

I also feel that my background teaching preschoolers, kindergarteners and older students provides me with valuable first hand knowledge as to what types of educational outcomes will most benefit young children during their preschool years, as they transition to kindergarten, and beyond.



A Brief History of the Samuel Morey Preschool

Fifteen years ago, the first Rivendell Interstate School District preschool opened in the Westshire Elementary School. A long waiting list for spaces resulted, ten years ago, with the opening of a second preschool classroom in the Samuel Morey School. (Due to continuing demand for space, we opened our third classroom, also in the Westshire School, three years ago.)

Since its inception, the Rivendell preschool program has offered both half and full day scheduling options for families, as well as giving parents the choice of how many days (with a minimum of two and maximum of five) and which particular days of the week they would like to have their preschool child attend the program.

Judging by enrollment, family participation in the program, parent survey results, feedback from elementary staff and many other indicators, the Samuel Morey Preschool has been a very successful and greatly appreciated part of the Rivendell communities that are served by the school.

High Quality Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In each of our preschool classrooms we offer very high quality, child-centered, and developmentally appropriate curricula and activities. School district professional development and professional collaborative opportunities, along with public school expectations that all teaching staff are certified and highly qualified educators, support our ability to do so. As educators holding Vermont early childhood endorsements we are very cognizant of the educational and developmental needs of the special young children that attend our preschool program. Our play-based, experiential approach is research based and tailored to the specific interests, preferences and learning characteristics of the children in each group.

An Integral Part of the School

A good amount that is beneficial and valuable about the Samuel Morey Preschool experience derives, in my opinion, from the embedded nature of the classroom in the local elementary school that the children will be attending. The preschool classroom is not just “in a room” in the elementary school building. It is an integral part of the school, with strong and deep connections to the kindergarten classroom, the other children and staff in the school, the local families that are involved in their children’s educations, and the community as a whole.



Preschoolers' Connections to Family Members, Friends, and Community Members

It is hard to express, in a quantitative way, the deep importance of family and community connection that is provided by being in the elementary school to the young children that attend the preschool and their parents. What I can say is that for many of the preschoolers it is simply a huge deal (that greatly impacts their preschool experience) to have the opportunity on a daily basis to see and interact with their older siblings and other friends from the community while they are attending the preschool.

Facilitating Involvement by Current Parents and Future Families

Were the preschool to not be situated in the community-based elementary school, we would likely have less involvement by parents and other family members (who find it so easy and convenient to spend time with us and their children when they are in school). We would also lose the crucial connections that we have with parents of children who are not currently enrolled, but may be at some time in the future. Many such parents visit us on a regular basis, often with their young children that will be transitioning to the preschool program. In this way not only is the transition to kindergarten being prepared for, but the transition to preschool is also being greatly facilitated.

Transition to Kindergarten and Elementary School

The transition to kindergarten is a widely researched and discussed educational topic. It is well documented that a smooth and successful transition to the kindergarten grade is extremely important to the long term success and well-being of children who attend school.

We focus on building a strong bond with the kindergarten staff and program, so that when it is time for the preschoolers to “cross the hall” they already have a close connection to the kindergarten teacher and are very comfortable with the kindergarten classroom (as well as the other locations in the building where they will be attending school). By the time that the preschoolers are ready to begin kindergarten they are already viewing the school as a very familiar and comfortable place where they have established strong ties and supports.

When I have worked in the past with preschools and childcare programs that are not located in elementary schools, the kindergarten transition might have consisted of a single visit to the elementary school (or may have not occurred at all). This, is in stark contrast to the ongoing and robust transitional process that takes place over the course of a year (or two) in our public school sited program.

Connecting Parents to the Elementary School

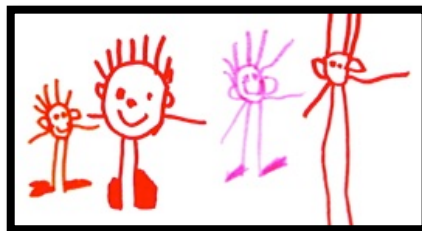
The preschool classroom provides an entryway to the elementary school not just for the children who will be attending kindergarten but also to their parents and other family members. At no time in their future is it likely that most parents will spend nearly as much time in the school environment as they do when their children are in the preschool (where parents generally drop off and pick up their children each day and also spend additional time in the classroom for a variety of reasons). This gives us the opportunity to make strong positive connections with these parents that can then continue once their children move on to the higher grades. Many of the parents who become very “at home” in the school during their children’s time in preschool might not otherwise easily be comfortable in a school environment (due to their own histories and experiences relating to education and schools).

Continuing Benefits for Preschool “Graduates”

Not only do the children who currently attend the Samuel Morey preschool classroom greatly benefit from its location in the school, but the children who have attended in the past and “moved on” also continue to profit. Preschool “graduates” still typically feel a close bond to the staff and program where they began their school careers. Many of them drop by to “touch base”, connect with us in the hallways or outside, and in a variety of other ways stay connected in a very positive way with the preschool.

Collaboration With Elementary Teachers

I regularly talk with the teachers of the older students as I can share perceptions about the children and their families that are unique to the preschool experience. In the preschool we spend a great deal of time with parents, and these strong relationships, and the insights and knowledge that are gained through them, can continue to be of benefit as the children attend the elementary school classes. Conversely, the teachers of older siblings can share with us information that they have about a particular family (that older children can at times express more accurately and comprehensively) that is vital for us to know.



Benefits for At-Risk and Special Needs Children

One group of children that especially benefits from our location in the elementary school are those with special needs or who are otherwise at risk for having educational difficulties in the future. These, often our neediest and most vulnerable students, benefit inordinately from establishing close ties to the school in general and the kindergarten program in particular. They also continue to benefit from maintaining a connection to the preschool staff once they have moved on. A difficult transition to the elementary grades can be a significant setback to those that will already be challenged to be successful in school. In these cases familiarity with the school environment, a close connection to the kindergarten teacher, and carefully planned out transitional activities can make all the difference during that crucial first year of the elementary program.

Infants and Toddlers in the School

The preschool brings not only preschoolers but also their younger siblings into the elementary school. Most of these babies and toddlers will eventually attend the preschool and then move on to kindergarten. In these cases the children, some literally from birth, are comfortable in and familiar with the school they will be attending for much of their childhood. Not only does this confer a great advantage to these children and their families, but I believe that having these young children in the building makes the entire elementary school a richer place to be. How sad it would be (at least to me) if our elementary school community did not include infants, toddlers, and preschoolers!

Identifying and Recruiting Children/Families in Need of Preschool

Many of the children that eventually attend the preschool are enrolled because of our location in the elementary school. Their parents might come to visit the preschool on their own, the kindergarten (or another) teacher might suggest that they drop in on the preschool when they are already in the building, or I might introduce myself to a parent with a young child that is in the building or on the school grounds. In these ways many families that might otherwise not consider an early educational experience for their child can be approached with the idea that their children attend the preschool.



Parents Greatly Value the Preschool in Its Current Location

When reading the parental input (from parents surveys, progress reports, etc.) regarding the preschool over the past years, it is clear that parents really love the program. They trust us to provide for their very young children what is needed educationally, but even more so what is needed from an overall nurturing perspective. I have no doubt that being in the local community school (with all of the resulting previously discussed outcomes) plays a significant role in the strong and deeply positive feelings that parents have for the preschool.

Conclusion

My belief, based on my many years of experience working with preschoolers and older children in a variety of educational settings, is that attending preschool in a public school run and supported program sited in the elementary school where the children will attend school confers significant benefits upon the children that are enrolled and their families. I would be very happy to share any further information concerning our preschool program or my experiences working with preschoolers and other children.

Rob Reade
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Comments Regarding the Samuel Morey Preschool Excerpted from the STARS Assessor's Summary Report ~ January 20, 2015

This classroom environment and culture are models for other programs. The environment is immediately aesthetically effective and pleasing. The flow of the day was precise, yet fluid. Children were engaged and relaxed. Interactions among and with children were thoughtful, stimulating, and clear.

Parents are clearly welcomed and involved. The lead teacher and classroom assistant clearly know their roles and move smoothly from one portion of the day to another, interacting with each other and with children calmly, professionally, and intentionally. The environment is rich with language, stimulation, and choices. Children were allowed to form groups or to work as individuals and they embraced this freedom within an obvious routine.

(T)his program is exemplary. Housed in an elementary school, it benefits from the infrastructure of a school setting and yet stays true to the best practices of early childhood. The conversations and interactions observed suggested this is a safe, enriching environment for children and their families to be cherished.

