

Fresh Start Academy

What is Fresh Start Academy?

Fresh Start Academy is a program for children in kindergarten through Grade 2. Children recommended for the program are those who repeatedly display extreme disruptive behaviors. The behaviors, such as destruction of classrooms, running away from the classroom and causing physical harm to others, create a barrier to learning for all students. Students may be placed at the Academy only after a school has exhausted other available and appropriate interventions. Placement in the program is for about 45 days.

Fresh Start will offer a setting that is data-driven, highly structured, and safe for kindergarten through Grade 2 students who persistently demonstrate behavior that impedes their ability to learn.

What is the goal?

The program will provide the support needed to help our youngest children develop self-control without falling behind academically. The goal of Fresh Start is to identify students with behavior problems early and address the behaviors. The experience helps the student continue with his/her regular studies while staff introduces a positive approach to behavioral support through early intervention.

Other goals include:

- returning the student to their original classroom setting with support;
- keeping the student on track academically;
- providing professional development for staff; and
- forming a partnership with parents.

Program components

- Self-regulatory social and academic skills in a small group setting;
- Therapeutic counseling; and
- Grade-level academic standards.

How are students selected for the program?

Parents may request enrollment in the program and/or a building administrator could refer a student to the Fresh Start Academy Team. The Fresh Start Academy Team reviews all recommendations and is composed of members from various departments.

Before a student can be considered for the program, the team must consider the following.

- Has the school exhausted all other support options?
- Has the school provided school and classroom behavior supports?
- Has the school implemented a Student Support Team (SST) plan?
- Has the school psychologist/behavior specialist observed the student?
- Is there data supporting the behavior and interventions?
- Has the school tried altering the student's classroom environment or schedule?

Is there parent input in the placement?

Yes, parents are involved throughout the process. Experience shows that when the school and parents work together, child behavior change is more readily made and has a longer lasting effect. Therefore, it is critical that Fresh Start Academy procedures include parent involvement. Parents participate in the SST meetings. Through these meetings, parents have an opportunity to review all information and participate in decision-making.

How will students transition back to their home school?

Staff will develop an individual transition plan for each child when the child is ready to return to their home school. The transition coordinator will ensure children receive continued support at their home school by providing training to school administrators, teachers and staff on how to continue successful supports for the children. Staff from the home school will visit Fresh Start to keep a connection with the child and to learn techniques and strategies for reintegration to the classroom. Parents are an integral part of the program and will receive training to help their child and opportunities to work with Fresh Start staff.

What determined the need for the program?

CCPS is experiencing an increase in the number of young children with severe physical behaviors who are causing repeated disruption to instruction and the safety and security of classrooms. The program came out of conversations with principals, teachers and parents about what other supports the school system could provide for young children. Research shows that early intervention leads to improved outcomes for a child's learning and development in school.

What is the staffing?

CCPS has hired a behavioral specialist as the program coordinator. There will be three certified teachers, three classroom instructional assistants, a transition coordinator and secretarial support. Additionally, counselors and school psychologists will help students attending the program. Cost of implementing the program is \$452,200.

Why is program located outside of the child's school?

The program requires a smaller environment to help students who need more individualized instruction and behavior modifications. The program requires a low student-to-teacher ratio as well as specialized support from a behavior specialist. CCPS anticipates the program will start with about 12 students, making it cost prohibitive to include at 22 elementary schools, all of which might not have a student with a need for the program. A centralized program allows CCPS to combine its resources and serve all children who could benefit from the support Fresh Start will offer.

How will students be transported to the program?

Students will ride school buses dedicated to transporting Fresh Start Academy students.

Where will the program be located?

Fresh Start will be at the Robert D. Stethem Educational Center in Pomfret. The program will use the space now occupied by the Lifelong Learning Center, which will move out this summer. The program space is in a separate building from the high school and middle school programs. CCPS has renovation plans to tailor the building to the needs of the program and young students. Plans include four separate classrooms, a workroom, a sensory room, administrative offices and

a secure entrance/exit. Elementary students' schedules do not overlap with the middle and high school students. They arrive at least an hour after the older students and leave at least an hour after dismissal of the older students.

What is the Robert D. Stethem Educational Center?

The Robert D. Stethem Educational Center offers a number of programs for CCPS students. It is an alternative education center that serves students assigned there for discipline issues as well as students who opt into the program for its smaller class sizes and additional supports. Stethem also houses evening high school, the Virtual Academy and career-related courses for students exploring post-secondary options. Career classes include automotive technician, HVAC, interactive media, pharmacy technician and physical rehabilitation.