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Fairhaven School is transitioning to a Preschool Special Education Licensing Model. What does this new licensing model mean for students?

For the upcoming school year, our preschool program is evolving in thoughtful and exciting ways to better meet the needs of our students and families.

We are transitioning to a Preschool Special Education licensing model, aligned with Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-11 (Preschool Special Education) and recent statewide guidance discussions. This model is designed to ensure that classrooms are structured around the needs of students with disabilities, with supports embedded directly into the learning environment.

As part of this transition, and following staff retirements, our program will move from 10 classrooms to 8 classrooms. This shift allows us to more intentionally focus our resources, space, and staffing to provide high-quality, individualized support for every child we serve. Importantly, our commitment to serving students with disabilities remains strong. In fact, this shift allows us to be even more intentional in how we design our classrooms to meet increasingly complex student needs. As we continue to see students requiring additional supports, adaptive equipment, and specialized instruction, this model ensures we are well-equipped to provide the level of care and education they deserve.

Will preschool classrooms still have an integrated structure?

Our preschool classrooms will continue to include a balanced and inclusive structure of approximately six students with disabilities and four typically developing peers. Class sizes will be adjusted slightly in the new model—from current capacity of 12 students to 10—to allow for increased space, support, and access to specialized resources. This creates a more personalized learning environment where every student can thrive.

This approach also aligns with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – Child Find requirement, which ensures children are identified and supported as early as possible. Under this model, students who are newly identified as needing services can seamlessly continue learning in their classroom without disruption—keeping the focus where it belongs: on student growth and success.

How will this change the number of preschool students served?

Currently, across 10 classrooms, we have the capacity to serve 120 preschool students, including 60 students with disabilities. With this updated model, 8 classrooms will serve approximately 80 preschool students, including 48 students with disabilities. While the overall number of students will be smaller, this change reflects a more individualized, supportive, and responsive program designed around student needs.

Will there be any adjustments to the preschool schedule?

The preschool program will be changing to a 4-day week for the 2026-2027 school year. This was a very thoughtful decision, centered around what is best for our young learners. Preschool-aged children grow and learn best when there is a healthy balance of engaging instruction, play, rest, and time with family.

This schedule allows us to support the whole child while continuing to provide meaningful, high-quality learning experiences during the school week. It also gives our staff dedicated time to plan, collaborate, and prepare—something that directly benefits our students through stronger instruction, more individualized supports, and well-prepared classrooms each day.

In addition, this time creates more opportunities for our staff to support families in meaningful ways. This may include connecting families with community resources, offering additional communication and collaboration, and when appropriate, providing home-based support to help carry over skills beyond the classroom.

Just as importantly, our program will continue to fully meet Ohio's preschool special education requirements under Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-11 (Preschool Special Education). These guidelines focus on the total number of instructional hours provided over the year (a minimum of 360 hours), and our program will continue to meet—and exceed—those expectations while maintaining a high-quality experience for students.

We feel confident that this structure supports both student development and program quality, and we are proud to be making this shift in a way that keeps our focus right where it belongs—on our students. We understand that any schedule change can take some adjustment for families, and we truly appreciate your continued support and partnership.

Do you have plans for the additional space now available?

Another exciting outcome of this transition is the opportunity to enhance student supports and enrichment experiences. With additional space available, we will expand access to music therapy through The Groovy Garfoose and visual arts programming through SMARTS (Students Motivated by the Arts) Youngstown. This space will also allow us to further integrate our partnership with Cadence Care, providing dedicated areas for services that support students' mental health and social-emotional development. These supports are an essential part of helping our students build independence, regulate emotions, and succeed both in and out of the classroom; providing these services in dedicated spaces allows students to build independence and participate in "specials," creating experiences that mirror a more traditional school environment.

Trumbull County Board of DD's Commitment to Fairhaven School

Fairhaven School is operated by the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Our mission is to provide enriching experiences that benefit both children and their families.

Our preschool program remains a strong foundation for future success, and we continue to see it as an important pathway into our school-age services. With a robust waitlist at the school-age level, we remain well-positioned to support students across all age groups. The changes to the preschool program for the 2026-2027 school year reflect our continued commitment to growth, innovation, and providing the highest quality educational experience for our students—both now and into the future.



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