## SOMSD Preschool Program Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### 1. What is the SOMSD Preschool Program?

The SOMSD Preschool Program is a high-quality early childhood education program for **three- and four-year-old children** who are residents of **South Orange or Maplewood.** The program is primarily funded through the Preschool Education Expansion Aid (PEEA) and follows a state-approved, research-based curriculum.

### 2. What does it cost to attend the SOMSD Preschool Program?

The SOMSD Preschool Program is offered at **no cost** to age-eligible children who are residents of the District.

### 3. What curriculum is used?

All preschool classrooms use the **Tools of the Mind** curriculum, a state-approved, research-based program that supports children's social-emotional development, early literacy, math skills, and self-regulation. Because the curriculum is consistent across all sites, children receive the same educational experience regardless of location.

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# Eligibility, Application, and Lottery Process

### 4. Who is eligible for priority enrollment in preschool?

Students who are eligible for special education services will be placed directly into our preschool program and will not participate in the lottery process. In addition, in accordance with the New Jersey Universal Preschool and Kindergarten Act (P.L. 2025, c.100 and P.L. 2025, c.101), students who meet the state's priority enrollment criteria (e.g., recent immigrants, low-income, teen parents, homelessness) will receive priority placement and will not be included in the lottery.

### 5. How do I register my child for the Preschool Program?

Families interested in the District's Preschool Program must complete and submit an online lottery entry form by the posted deadline. (Failure to complete this form prior to the deadline will result in your child being ineligible for the lottery, which determines participation in the initial placement process.)

The District's Preschool Program Lottery is held in the spring. Families will receive an email with their acceptance status. Applicants who are not selected will automatically be placed on the waitlist.

Families who receive a placement offer will have **three to four weeks** to complete the District's required two-step enrollment (registration) process by the specified deadline. Completing the enrollment process by the deadline confirms acceptance of the preschool placement. Families who do not complete enrollment by the deadline will automatically forfeit their child's seat.

Families who are selected through the lottery but choose not to accept the placement must decline their seat by emailing their child's school and Ms. Felicia China-Richardson at fchina@somsd.k12.nj.us.

### 6. Is the lottery form available in other languages?

Yes, the lottery entry form will be available in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.

### 7. What if I miss the lottery deadline?

Families who miss the lottery entry form submission deadline, or who move into South Orange or Maplewood after the lottery has taken place may still submit a lottery entry form. However, please note the following:

- Placement will only be considered after all students from the original lottery, including those on the waitlist, have been placed.
- Late submissions received after the deadline will be automatically added to the waitlist on a rolling, first-come, first-served basis.
- Students submitted after the deadline will be offered placement only if space becomes available.

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## Preschool Locations and Placement

### 8. What preschools are part of the SOMSD Preschool Program?

The program currently includes the following sites:

- Applecore Learning Center – Maplewood
- La Petite Academy – Maplewood
- La Petite Academy – South Orange
- Zadie's of the Oranges – East Orange
- Montrose Early Childhood Center – South Orange

- Iris Family Center for Early Childhood Education – South Orange
- Curious Children Childcare Center – South Orange
- Village Babies Development Center – South Orange
- Mickey Fried Preschool – South Orange
- Beth El Preschool – South Orange

### 9. How is my child's preschool placement determined?

The District uses a **proximity-based placement model**, which prioritizes placing children as close to their homes as possible. This model also supports the District's integration efforts.

### 10. Do parents get to choose the preschool location?

At this time, families do **not select a preferred preschool site**. Placement is determined by the District.

### 11. Why is preschool placement considered a "fluid" process?

Preschool placement remains fluid until the District reaches **Universal Preschool status**, meaning there is a seat available for every eligible child. Until then:

- Spots may open throughout the year due to families declining placement, moving out of the district, or qualifying for specialized services.
- The District continues to place students equitably as openings occur.

### 12. How will families on the waitlist be notified?

Families offered placement after the initial lottery will be notified **by email** as space becomes available.

### 13. What is the registration guidance for returning students?

Students who are currently enrolled and actively participating in our preschool program as Pre-K 3 students do not need to re-register for the following school year. All returning students will automatically roll over, and their school placement will remain the same.

Additionally, students who are currently enrolled as Pre-K 4 students and are eligible to advance to kindergarten do not need to register separately for kindergarten. Upon completion of their preschool program, these students will be automatically placed into kindergarten.

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## Program Structure and Daily Schedule

### 14. What are the school day hours?

The preschool day is **six hours long**.

- 8:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m.

### 15. Are half-day programs available?

No. All SOMSD preschool programs operate on a **full-day schedule**.

### 16. When does the preschool year begin?

The Preschool Program follows the **District's annual school calendar**, not a partnering provider site's private program calendar.

### 17. Where can I find the school calendar?

The District calendar is available on the SOMSD website:
https://www.somsd.k12.nj.us/district-calendar-handbook/

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## Transportation and Childcare

### 18. Will my child receive bus transportation?

Beginning in the **2026–2027 school year**, the District will no longer provide transportation for **general education Pre-K students**.
Transportation **will continue** for preschool students with disabilities when required by their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

### 19. Is before- and after-care available?

Availability depends on the preschool site. Each provider manages its own program. Families should contact the individual site directly for details, availability, and costs.

- Applecore: Contact Applecore for more information. Applecorelearningecc@gmail.com
- La Petite: Contact La Petite for more information. placey@somsd.k12.nj.us
- At Montrose, the YMCA runs the before and aftercare program on site. There are limited spots. Contact the Y directly to find out if there is space available. www.metroymcas.org/south-mountain-ymca/montrose-before-care-after-care/

- Zadies: Contact Zadie's for more information. csmith2@somsd.k12.nj.us
- Iris: Contact Iris for more information. jrubin@tstinj.org
- Curious Children: Contact Curious Children for more information. sbrown1@somsd.k12.nj.us
- Village Babies: Contact Village Babies for more information. info@villagebabies.com
- Mickey Fried Preschool: Contact Mickey Fried for more information. cbruen@somsd.k12.nj.us
- Beth El Preschool: Contact Beth El Preschool for more information. dweitz@somsd.k12.nj.us

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# Classrooms, Staffing, and Instruction

### 20. How many classrooms are at each site?

- At Applecore there are 4 classrooms.
- At Zadie's there are 2 classrooms.
- At La Petite (Maplewood) there are 3 classrooms.
- At La Petite (South Orange) there is 1 classroom.
- At Montrose there are 9 classrooms.
- At Iris there are 4 classrooms.
- At Curious Children there are 2 classrooms.
- At Village Babies there are 2 classrooms.
- At Mickey Fried preschool there are 5 classrooms
- At Beth El Preschool there are 3 classrooms

### 21. How many children are in each class?

All general education classrooms have a **maximum of 15 students**. Self-contained special education classrooms have a maximum of **12 students**.

### 22. Are 3-year-old and 4-year-old students in separate classes?

No. All preschool classrooms are **multi-age**, serving both 3- and 4-year-old students.

### 23. What are the teacher qualifications?

All preschool teachers are **New Jersey State Certified** and hold at least a **Bachelor's degree**. The District prioritizes hiring **dual-certified teachers**, meaning they are certified in both early childhood education and special education.

### 24. What is a paraprofessional?

Paraprofessionals are classroom aides who support teachers and students.

- Every classroom has **one classroom paraprofessional**.
- Additional paraprofessionals may be assigned to support students with special needs (1:1 or shared).

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## Meals, Allergies, and Health

### 25. How do lunch and snack work?

- Snack and lunch are eaten in the classroom.
- Families provide a daily snack.
- Lunch may be brought from home or provided through the school's lunch program.
- Families will be notified of any allergy-related food restrictions before the school year begins.

**Information about free or reduced lunch can be found here:**
**https://www.somsd.k12.nj.us/district/food-services/freereducedapplication/**

### 26. What is the policy on food allergies?

Each preschool follows its building-specific allergy procedures and adheres to Board of Education Policy #5331, available on the District website.

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## Special Education and Student Supports

### 27. What is an inclusion classroom?

Inclusion classrooms serve both general education students and students receiving special education services. A maximum of **five students with an Individualized Education Program** may be placed in a 15-student classroom.

### 28. What if I think my child needs additional support?

1. Start by speaking with your child's teacher.
2. If concerns continue, the **Preschool Intervention and Referral Team (PIRT)** may become involved.

3. If additional support is needed, a referral to the **Child Study Team (CST)** may be made to determine whether an evaluation for an IEP is warranted.

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# Family Engagement and Next Steps

### 29. How can families get involved?

Some preschools have a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) or Parent Committee. Families should contact their child's school for information about volunteer opportunities.

### 30. Where can I find more information or ask questions?

Parent Handbooks will be shared before the school year begins. In the meantime, families may contact their preschool site directly or email:
prekinfo@somsd.k12.nj.us

**Additional information is available at:**
**https://www.somsdk12.org/district/preschool**

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# Kindergarten Transition (For Preschool Families)

### 31. When will families be notified of Kindergarten placement?

Kindergarten placement information is available on the Triple I microsite, accessible through the District's website: https://sites.google.com/somsd.k12.nj.us/somsdintegration/

### 32. How is Kindergarten placement determined?

Please refer to the Triple I microsite's **Frequently Asked Questions** page for detailed information