

Victory Child Care is ‘immersed in education,’ founder says

by Elizabeth Floyd Mair

ALBANY — Many of the students in Victory Reidy’s pre-kindergarten programs leave knowing how to read and write all of their letters, in upper and lower case, and knowing their letter sounds and many sight words. They learn this and more through a curriculum that is based on play, with no rote learning.

But there is singing. “Singing is a great way for students to learn,” said Riedy. “Singing is a way for children to learn rhyming, which is an important part of their literature experience.”

And, there’s always sand, water, and Play-doh inside of all the classrooms, Riedy said, “because children learn from sensory activities best.”

Riedy is the founder of Victory Child Care, which will open six pre-kindergarten classrooms, with 15 students each, in Guilderland school buildings in the fall — two each in Altamont Elementary, Pine Bush Elementary, and Farnsworth Middle School. The plan was adopted as a way to fill empty classrooms rather than closing a neighborhood school as the district faces declining enrollment.

Some parents and staff at Pine Bush recently charged that Guilderland’s administration and school board have brought in this program without alerting them early enough, or getting enough input from them. They say that the placement of the pre-K in the school’s “blue pod” — and the building of a new playground just outside — will disrupt the kindergarten classes there and force one section of kindergarten to move to a different pod if enough children enroll to necessitate creating a third kindergarten class.

Superintendent Marie Wiles, in a [letter to the Enterprise editor this week](#), promises that, if a third section of kindergarten becomes necessary, it would be placed in the blue pod, allowing the kindergarten classes to stay together.

Wiles held a session on June 21 at Pine Bush Elementary School to explain the decision-making process conducted in meetings over more than a year, a process that was covered in over a dozen articles in The Enterprise. After residents raised objections to a consultant’s recommendations to close a school, the board backed off that plan in August 2014 and hosted a community forum that ultimately led to a task force where committees researched four options; the school board unanimously adopted the pre-K plan.



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Victory! The founder of Victory Child Care, Victory Riedy, left, watches as Kiyan experiments with how tall a tower he can build without it falling down. Kiyan is a student at Club Fed.



The Enterprise — Michael Koff

Crafty math: *Charlotte and Marissa string beads for necklaces, following the pattern printed on a paper. They are students at Club Fed.*

The school board is slated to sign a contract with Victory Child Care at its July 5 meeting, Wiles said.

“Educational services for children begin at birth,” Riedy told The Enterprise during a tour this week of her pre-K classrooms at the Leo W. O’Brien Federal Building in Albany. “The parent is the child’s first teacher, and we partner closely with parents to provide an individualized program.”

A child must be 2 years and 9 months old to start at Club Fed, as the program at the federal building is called. There are seven classrooms, for children ranging from infancy to about 5 years old.

The different “centers” in each classroom each support the curriculum, Reidy said. In the 3-year-olds’ room, where they were studying dinosaurs and the letter “D,” construction-paper Ds hung from the ceiling, colored all over with crayons. “They trace and cut out the letters, which are pre-writing skills,” Reidy said.

In that classroom, they read dinosaur-themed sight-word books. Children bring in small show-and-tell items from home whose names start with the letter D. They search for hidden dinosaurs in the sandbox. They draw pictures and write about what they might like to do with a pet dinosaur.

At Club Fed, there are teachers who speak Spanish and Russian. Children are taught to sing simple songs in these languages. This exposure to foreign languages will also be part of the program at Guilderland, although Reidy said that the language or languages to be taught were not yet decided.



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Never too early: Teacher Tania Arzu and Justin work on a writing project at Club Fed, picking his favorite dinosaur, tracing it, and writing what he has learned about it.

In the 4-year-olds' room, where students were also studying dinosaurs, an easel held a large piece of paper with columns marked "herbivores," "carnivores," and "omnivores," with definitions of each below. Another easel held a sheet that tallied students' favorite dinosaurs; the handwriting for the tallies was clearly a child's. Still another held a bar graph that compared the tallies.

Teachers create some of the innovative learning tools used in the classrooms. Asked about a tray of PVC pipes, each in the shape of a "C" or old-fashioned telephone receiver — each actually two curved plastic pipes fastened together with colorful duct tape — Reidy said they are used to teach children to form sounds correctly. The student makes a sound into one end of the "phone" and hears it greatly amplified through the other, and can tell if the pronunciation is correct.

Riedy said that part of what students learn is a "kindness curriculum," in which they are taught to negotiate conflicts themselves. When two students have a conflict, Riedy said, "They both are responsible."

They go over to the so-called "peace table," talk about what happened and "come up with a solution that everybody can live with," said Riedy. They then each draw out a marble from a bucket and "put it into the 'let-it-go jar' and run off," she said.



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'Multicultural baby dolls': *The teachers at Victory Child Care used socks to make these dolls, lying in their box-beds, for students to play with.*

This process rarely used, Reidy said, “because they’re good at solving issues.

“We have some kids,” she said, who were thrown out of other programs, and at Club Fed they don’t have any problems, “because we know how to set up programs.”

Club Fed uses a tool, she said, that measures the healthiness of child-child, adult-adult, and adult-child interactions in the classroom, she said.

“We’re immersed in education here,” she said.

Corrected on June 30, 2016: Our original story named a specific location for a potential displaced pre-kindergarten class; Superintendent Marie Wiles promised no particular location.

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