

# Warm Welcome

## Lewis-Palmer Early Childhood Program, Lewis-Palmer School District

*Submitted by Melissa Gibson-Steiner, [mgibson-steiner@lewispalmer.org](mailto:mgibson-steiner@lewispalmer.org)*

Lewis-Palmer School District's Early Childhood Program supports the transition of children ages three and four from home to school. It fosters relationships with the families by hosting a "Warm Welcome" at the beginning of the school year. At back-to-school events, many families frequently meet the teacher and explore the classroom simultaneously, which can be chaotic, especially for young children. The Warm Welcome came from recognizing the need to build better relationships with children and families before school started.



When teachers returned in early August, they invited families to sign up for a specific time to come to school for the Warm Welcome. During these 15-20 minute visits, the child explored the classroom, got to know the teacher and the assistants, and saw the partnership between their family and the school. They learned school is a safe and fun environment. The family received pertinent school information, submitted required paperwork, and asked questions. Teachers inquired about the child's interests, strengths, and potential needs. Teachers had talking points to help encourage parents to share. They asked what their child's special interests are, what goals the family had for their child, and if the child used a different name other than their given name. Teachers shared tips for talking to the child about school before the first day. Parents were encouraged to take a picture of their child and the teacher doing an activity planned for the day. Teachers also provided suggestions for drop-off if the parent anticipated challenges.

After 4-5 family visits, the early childhood staff [debriefed their observations](#) of the children who visited. They identified two strengths and asked if there was a reported or observed need. If a need existed, they discussed possible strategies to support the transition. Staff reported that taking the time to share observations benefited children on the first day of school because they had supports in place. After the staff met all the children, they expanded their debrief conversations to align strategies between the adults within the classroom. These included slight changes to classroom routines and providing accommodations for children.

By adjusting the beginning-of-year schedule, teachers can better prepare and assist families in transitioning to the preschool classroom, leading to an exceptional year of learning and growth. They described the benefits of the Warm Welcome as an opportunity to get to know the students' and families' stories, observe the child, ask follow-up questions, and plan for children who may struggle with the transition to school. Families expressed gratitude for this unique opportunity.