

My name is Melissa Bowman. I have had the privilege of teaching in several early childhood classrooms over the past eleven years. It is extremely rewarding to work with young children. I am always amazed by how much progress a young child can make in one short school year.

My first teaching experience was in a first grade class in a Philadelphia public school. A few children in my class attended a head start program that was housed in the same school. The program definitely made a positive difference for the students who were lucky enough to attend. However, most of the children in my class did not attend any type of pre-school program. They had missed that ideal window for learning. Many came into my first grade class without the simple knowledge of letters or sounds. Several children showed frustration and behavior problems ensued. Unfortunately the challenge of catching up for these children was a near impossible task.

My next teaching experience was as a kindergarten teacher in a wonderful and very high quality childcare center. The children in this school often had several years of pre-school experience before coming to my kindergarten classroom. The children in this program flourished. Parents often came back with reports of how their children were showing advanced achievement in their elementary schools.

Three years ago I came to Morrisville as the Pre-K teacher. I was given the wonderful opportunity and resources to help build an exceptional high quality Pre-K Counts program in Morrisville. Parents were thrilled to have this program available. Several parents expressed that if it had not been for this program their child would not have attended Pre-K because of the great cost. For many of the children in my Pre-K class this was their first school experience. I set high goals for my class and the students exceeded my expectations. The children learned letters, numbers, and sight words as well as how to listen attentively and work cooperatively with others. By the end of the year they had not only made a huge amount of progress cognitively, but also socially. They left my class ready to be the leaders and role models in their new kindergarten classrooms.

At the end of the school year last year, there was a great amount of uncertainty about whether or not the Pre-K program would have funding to continue in Morrisville. For that reason I requested a change to a kindergarten position. This year in my kindergarten class I am lucky enough to have four students who were in my Pre-K class last year. All four students are reading and performing above the expected level, with two of the students reading on a third grade reading level! After talking with the three other kindergarten teachers in the district, we all agree that children who attend a quality Pre-K program are very easy to spot. They come to school with the understanding of how a classroom works and with the knowledge needed to thrive with our fast paced kindergarten curriculum.

It is well known that the first five years of a child's life are critical for learning and brain development. What a child learns during these early years will directly impact what he or she is capable of learning in the future. The benefit of quality Pre-K programs has been clearly evident to me throughout my teaching. Young children are capable of learning an

extraordinary amount, if given the opportunity. Pre-K programs are essential in assuring school success for **all** children!