

Plainfield celebrates young learners and advocates during the Month of the Young Child.

By Cheryl Makin

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Plainfield community celebrates and advocates for young children during the Month of the Young Child. Children from the Washington Community Kindergarten performed a song at the kickoff ceremony.(Photo: Keith A. Muccilli/Staff Photographer)Buy Photo

Story Highlights

- Month of the Young Child kicked off Tuesday at Plainfield City Hall.
- Throughout April, activities based on the theme of "Celebrating Our Youngest Learners" are planned.

- Plans include a Donate-A-Book Campaign with a goal of collecting 2,000 books to be distributed to the children.
- Month of the Young Child will conclude with a Free Family Fun Fair from 3 to 7 p.m. on April 28.

PLAINFIELD – Joyous laughter and happy giggles were encouraged Tuesday as city officials and staff continued a 29-year-old tradition of bringing awareness to the needs of the young as they kicked off April as the Month of the Young Child with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

More than 100 young children from preschool through third grade also showed off their song and dance skills with musical and movement performances for the crowd at City Hall that included a mix of community members, parents, city and county officials and staff; along with Plainfield Public Schools Superintendent Anna Belin-Pules and Mayor Adrian O. Mapp,

"It truly was representative of a community collaboration," said Lamishka Cooper-Turnbull, community and parent involvement specialist/social worker with Plainfield Public Schools Office of Early Childhood Programs and Services Department. "As well as adorable."

First established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1971 as the Week of the Young Child, the celebration recognized that the early childhood years — birth through eight years old — lay the foundation for children's success in school and later in life.

According to National Institute for Early Education Research-Rutgers University, Cooper-Turnbull said the state stands as a national leader in providing access and resources for preschool, ranking second in the nation for access for 3-year olds, sixteenth for access to preschool for 4-year olds and first in the nation for fiscal resources provided.

With the Month of the Young Child celebration, the city has been another means of advocating for children's success for almost three decades, she said.



Plainfield community celebrates and advocates for young children during the Month of the Young Child. Children from the Barlow School Second Grade performed a routine at the kickoff ceremony. (Photo: Keith A. Muccilli/ Staff Photographer)

More than 25 years ago, the city's Neighborhood House Association spearheaded making a week-long celebration longer by creating Month of the Young Child, complete with a parade. Each year the number of participants grew and in 2009, it was estimated that more than 2,000 children and adults marched from Plainfield City Hall to Library Park.

For 14 years, the Plainfield Initiative for Early Childhood Educational Services (P.I.E.C.E.S.), part of Plainfield Public Schools Early Childhood Advisory Council, has assisted in the collaboration of the Month of the Young Child by planning a celebration. The parade was replaced with a carnival one year and due to the large number of participants, safety and age appropriateness, the celebration became one of sidewalk and park activities for the last five years.

Throughout April, activities based on the theme of "Celebrating Our Youngest Learners" are planned in the 17 preschool center sites and 11 elementary schools throughout the city. This year's events continue the tradition of including young children from various preschool centers and elementary schools as well as parents, educators and community members.

"Each of the centers and schools will host an activity that everyone is invited to," Cooper-Turnbull said.

With a focus on literacy, plans also include a Donate-A-Book Campaign with a goal of collecting 2,000 books to be distributed to the children. Community members invited to Tuesday's kick-off were asked to bring a book for donation and various community organizations are collecting books throughout March and April.

Many local businesses will display children's artwork created at the school/center nearest them to honor Month of the Young Child. Artwork will be on display at Burger King on Clinton Avenue, City Hall, McDonald's on Front Street, McDonald's on South Avenue, Neighborhood Health Services Corporation, Plainfield Public Library, Plainfield City Hall, Plainfield Public Schools Board of Education, Plainfield Senior Center, Sky Nails, Subway on Front Street, Twin City Supermarket, Wash-A-Load Laundromat, Wendy's on South Avenue and many others.



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Plainfield community celebrates and advocates for young children during the Month of the Young Child. At the kickoff ceremony, from left, Rosette Agyeman, a family worker from Playhouse Child Development Center, Richard Wyatt, a Plainfield School Board member, Evelyn Motley, director of Plainfield Public Schools Early Childhood Programs and Services, Dee Dameron, Co-Chair, P.I.E.C.E.S., Early Childhood Advisory Council, Ronald West, director of the Plainfield Department of Administration, Finance, Health and Social Services, Kim Wilson, program specialist at the Union County Council for Young Children, and Jessica Olivera, program director at the Union County Council for Young Children participate in the ribbon cutting. (Photo: Keith A. Muccilli/ Staff Photographer)

Month of the Young Child will conclude with a Free Family Fun Fair from 3 to 7 p.m. April 28. All preschool parents and children are invited to enjoy an evening of interactive activities including character greetings, face painting, story time readings, art projects, music, refreshments, gift baskets, prizes, giveaways and more. Community agencies will be sharing resources and information. The city police and fire departments will have police vehicles, a fire truck and Sparky, the fire dog on hand.

This event, a collaboration between Plainfield Board of Education Office of Early Childhood and Community Coordinated Child Care of Union County Strengthening Families Initiative, will be conducted at BUF Health and Human Services at 403 W. Seventh St. Union County Department of Human Services Paratransit System is offering free shuttle service at six designated pick-up and drop-off sites. Parents must sign up in advance at their child's preschool center.

For more information contact Evelyn Motley or Lumishka Cooper-Turnbull at Plainfield Public Schools Office of Early Childhood Programs & Services Department, 209 Berckman Street, Plainfield, NJ 07060, 908-731-4372, emotley@plainfield.k12.nj.us, lturnbull@plainfield.k12.nj.us.

Staff Writer Cheryl Makin: 732-565-7256; cmakin@mycentraljersey.com