



ABILITIES FIRST
ENRICHING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN
& ADULTS IN OUR COMMUNITIES

MEDIA ALERT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Abilities First Establishes First Integrated Preschool Program in New York State

Poughkeepsie, N.Y. (September 26, 2016) – Earlier this month, Abilities First, with the assistance of State Assemblymember Didi Barrett, received approval from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to create an innovative integrated preschool program in Hyde Park, N.Y., the first of its kind in New York State. Slated to open in the 2016-2017 school year, Abilities First will offer the opportunity for students with developmental delays and disabilities ages 3 – 4 to learn side-by-side with other children in an inclusive environment.

This is not the first program to combine preschool students with and without disabilities, but what makes this program new and innovative is the proportions of students with and without developmental delays and disabilities. The traditional model for integrated preschool classrooms is made up of approximately half (50%) of students with developmental delays and disabilities. The Abilities First integrated preschool model will include students with developmental delays and disabilities in regular classrooms at ratios that approximate what would be found in any naturally occurring context. That is, 25% students with disabilities or less. The result will be a richer experience for both students with and without developmental delays and disabilities.

About this news, Dr. Jeffery Fox, Chief Executive Officer of Abilities First said, “We are strongly committed to the creation of opportunities for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to participate in all stages of community life. With the support of the State Education Department, we will be piloting this program over the next three years to demonstrate the value of this innovative integration model at the preschool level. We believe it will enhance the social and educational experience for children with and without developmental delays and disabilities.”

Abilities First worked closely with New York State Assemblymember Didi Barrett and her staff throughout the application process. Because the program model is without precedent, the State Education Department, Abilities First, and Assemblymember Barrett’s office collaborated in a creative way to create this inclusive opportunity.

"As a mother I know that no two children learn the same way which means innovation and new thinking in the classroom are essential for a successful learning environment," said Assemblymember Didi Barrett. "I commend Dr. Fox and his team at Abilities First for their vision to develop this new integrated preschool model for students with disabilities and I appreciate that the State Education Department recognized this opportunity to explore a new kind of integrated classroom that more closely follows societal ratios."

The integrated preschool placements for students with disabilities will be combined with the already existing Universal Pre-kindergarten (UPK) program that Abilities First operates in collaboration with the Hyde Park Central School District. The UPK program was established in 2014 as part of Governor Cuomo's state-wide Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) initiative. Housed in the Hyde Park Elementary School, the UPK program consists of 68 students in 4 classes. The expanded program will mean adding a 5th classroom and 22 students with developmental delays and disabilities that would otherwise receive preschool services in programs that were only for children with disabilities.

Abilities First and Assemblymember Barrett hope to see this innovative integrated preschool model replicated statewide. For more information about the integrated preschool program, contact Leann Coyle, Director of Preschool and Universal Pre-K programs for Abilities First at 845-298-2090 ext. 104.

In addition to the UPK and Preschool, Abilities First provides a range of educational services, including the Abilities First School in LaGrange, N.Y. for students, ages 5 – 21 with developmental disabilities, including students on the Autism Spectrum.

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About Abilities First

Founded in 1962, Abilities First is a not-for-profit organization serving the needs of the community, as well as those with developmental disabilities, from pre-school through adulthood. Abilities First has had a long-term commitment of providing a cohesive culture of compassion, empowerment and respect for people with a variety of disabilities through educational, vocational, residential, and habilitation services. It presently serves over 1,200 children and adults throughout the Hudson Valley region of New York State. AF is accredited for person-centered care by the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) and takes pride in collaboration with government, community organizations, business, and other non-profit organizations.

Abilities First's mission is to provide people with disabilities and their families support to attain independence, self-determination, integration and acceptance by others through education, exploration and experience.

For more information, visit www.AbilitiesFirstNY.org or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AbilitiesFirstInc and [@AbilitiesF](https://twitter.com/AbilitiesF) on Twitter.