

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5

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Parent Hotline: 412.622.7920 | www.pps.k12.pa.us

Welcome!

Dear Parents, Students and Community Members,

The staff of Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5, an African-Centered Academy, welcomes you and your child to our school community. We count it a privilege to partner with you as we work collaboratively to develop the whole child both academically as well as socially. Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 creates a culture of excellence through high expectations and accountability for all stakeholders where failure is not an option. Our student-centered approach to education is designed to provide every child with a gratifying yet rigorous school experience, everyday, every period, from bell to bell.

We encourage you to review this handbook and use it as a guide throughout the school year to familiarize yourself with our school policies, procedures and expectations. Please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments or concerns. I can be reached at (412) 338-3830.

Again, welcome to Miller PreK-5.
Join us on The Pathway to the Promise!

Sincerely,

Dr. Margaret J. Starkes-Ross, Principal

OUR BELIEFS

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 is an African-Centered School, teaching and promoting the history and culture of people of African descent. We provide a quality comprehensive education in which teachers believe all children can learn. We use both traditional and innovative teaching and learning methods to draw from each child his or her unique gifts of knowledge and understanding. We work to nurture the whole child—the cognitive, social-emotional, physical and spiritual aspects. Our beliefs are consistent with the District's Declaration of Beliefs.

- All children can learn at high levels
- Teachers have a profound impact on student development, and should have ample training, support and resources
- Education begins with a safe and healthy learning environment
- Families are an essential part of the educational process
- A commitment from the entire community is necessary to build a culture that encourages student achievement
- Improvement in education is guided by consistent and effective leadership
- Central office exists to serve students and schools

SCHOOL MOTTO

When we believe, we all achieve!

OUR VISION

Children need to feel connected to their culture and to see in their heritage all of the positive traits and events that other children feel and see. Our vision is to create the type of learning environment that empowers students through a sense of cultural location and self-worth.

Every child at Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 receives a value-based education utilizing an Afrocentric approach that will prepare students to be competent, confident, conscious and contributing members of society. We will hold ourselves accountable for preparing all children to achieve academic excellence and strength of character, so that they have the opportunity to succeed in all aspects of life.

Our Goals

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 is striving toward excellence in student performance, excellence in curriculum, and excellence in teaching methods. To achieve these three pillars of excellence, the school environment must exemplify truth, balance, cultural pluralism (respect for all cultural centers), and historical accuracy. An African-centered school promotes the perspective that African people are centered, located, oriented and grounded in their heritage, culture, and contributions to the human experience. Heritage is what we receive from the past. It shapes our present identity and provides insight for our future. It includes a range of activities such as stewardship, preservation, research, education and engagement. In the centered school, children learn by first knowing themselves through the lens of their cultural heritage.

Defining an Afrocentric Education

Dr. Molefi Asante, the founding father of Afrocentric Education, defines Afrocentric education as giving the African child ownership of knowledge in the classroom, not made to feel like a renter of information. Dr. Asante states “Afrocentric education locates the child in his or her own intellectual and historical space and radiates to other spheres of knowledge.” It validates the child’s experiences and builds new knowledge linking the two together. African-centered education places people of African origin in control and at the center of their lives and their study. The child is placed and grounded at this center and all cultural groups are respected. African-centered education prepares students from conception to ancestry to live and serve the community, transmitting knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes for the betterment of humanity.

An Afrocentric Curriculum

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 serves predominantly African-American students in a predominantly African-American community. The curriculum therefore must be meaningful and relevant to the learner. A holistic approach beginning with an African-centered perspective must be infused into the curriculum acknowledging the development of civilization through Africa encompassing the world’s people in the present time.

An Afrocentric curriculum is one which places the African-American child in the center of the curriculum. The Afrocentric curriculum represents the concept of quality of thought and practice rooted in the cultural image and interest of African and African-American peoples. That is, it represents and reflects the life experiences, history, and traditions of

African and African-American peoples as the center of analyses (Nobles, 11).

With an African-centered curriculum, the students see themselves everywhere. History becomes personal as the student becomes centered in the culture, drawing his or her own lesson or constructing meaning from it. Students learn about the achievements and accomplishments of African and African-American people. They are taught to recognize cultural diversity as it exists on the African continent, recognize stereotypical images and understand behavior tolerance, because people of all races exhibit a range of behaviors, good and bad.

Rationale for Curriculum Infusion

The curriculum infusion process views the content as integral to the larger discussion, providing opportunities for the content to be included in a variety of academic disciplines, as opposed to exclusively Social Studies, for example. Students and teachers are afforded collaborating opportunities to explore and expand the concept of African and African-American history and culture beyond the chosen Black History month of February. Below are basic beliefs followed by teachers and administrators in the Centered School as defined by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante of Temple University.

- The student’s culture must be taken into account in every subject and every grade.
- Classroom lessons, scopes, and sequences reflect an original voice where students’ culture is always attached to history, concepts, mythology, science, mathematics, nature, motifs, and personalities that pervade the lessons.
- The school principal must energize the teachers and the teacher must energize the students.
- A centered school is positive, clean, brightly painted, environmentally centered to reflect the student population, and it is filled with color images, posters, and slogans of achievement. Each classroom is an invitation to learning.
- A centered classroom is a laboratory for creative discussion, discourse, debate, and critical thinking and teachers, with sensitivity that embraces discussion, corrects false information and irrational views.
- Students are taught to respect themselves, the search for knowledge, the teacher, and the other students.

- A centered school celebrates the culture of its students. Teachers feel comfortable wearing the fashions of the students' cultures, presenting speakers and performers from the culture, and infusing their lesson with illustration from the culture. A student in such a school understands the historical role other people have played in world events.
- A centered school involves the parents in the process of centering the students. Parents are invited to participate in workshops to learn to be centered so they can help their children. The school must educate the community on the ideas behind the centered school and give a brief history of the Afrocentric school concept.
- A centered school is a high achieving school where principal, teachers, and students meet regularly (at least once a month) to re-pledge themselves to academic and professional excellence. A high achieving school sets academic and cultural goals with the intent of being the best school possible.
- A centered school asks the question, who are my students? In answering this question, the centered school seeks to apply principles of learning styles, relational attributes, personality, and aesthetic sense to the issues of achievement, discipline, and environment.

SCHOOL PROCEDURES

Bell Schedule

Please visit our website at www.pps.k12.pa.us or contact our Parent Hotline at 412.622.7920 for the bell schedule for your child's school.

Attendance

Daily attendance is necessary for the successful attainment of classroom objectives. It is recognized that absence from time to time may be necessary under certain circumstances. When absent, the student must bring in a signed and dated excuses from home to school. Absence does not excuse the student from making up assignments. District policy sets a three-day limit on the number of days a student can legally miss per report card.

Arrival and Dismissal

All students arriving by bus must go directly to the cafeteria for breakfast and/or the auditorium for the daily Unity Circle.

Awards

- Students are honored at Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 for their individual or group achievement.

- Students are recognized for achieving Honor Roll by receiving a certificate of achievement.
- Students are also recognized at the end of the year awards ceremony.

Academic Awards

- Honor Roll and High Honor Roll
- Perfect Attendance
- Other Academic Awards identified by the principal
- Social Awards

Activities

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 offers a number of activities for our students. Boy and Girl Scouts, Chess Club, Writers Club, Poetry Club, Leadership Club and after-school enrichment activities. In addition, we offer African drumming and dance, Hotep Dance troupe, gardening, art enrichment and family fun nights. These activities help fully develop our students both physically and mentally. They also help develop school spirit and pride within our students.

Building Appearance—Cleanliness

The school building belongs to the community and each family and we are all responsible for maintain it to the best of our ability. Students are expected to care for the building and use it with respect. Students are expected to pick up after themselves. They are responsible, when appropriate, for their own messes in the hall, classroom, bathrooms, and dining areas. Defacing and destroying school property is a serious school offense and will be treated as such. Payment for any destruction will be the responsibility of the student and his/her parents.

Celebrations

The celebration of rituals and ceremonies are salient features of African culture, encompassing the spirituality of an ancestor by defining and identifying ourselves as one with all creation.

African Days Calendar

January 16th	Dr. Martin Luther King's Birthday
January 24th:	Martin Delaney Day of Passing
February:	Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5's Umoja/Unity Dinner
February:	Black History Month
February:	Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5's Living Museum

May 19:	Malcolm X Day
May 18:	Bring Your Father to School Day
May 25:	African Liberation Day
June:	Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5's Carnival
June 16:	Demark Vessey Day
June 19:	Juneteenth
July 17:	Maafa Commemoration
August 11:	Marcus Garvey Day
September:	Black Reading Month
October 16:	The Million Man Day of Atonement
October 31:	Ancestors Day
December 26:	Kwanzaa

Daily Unity Circle

Daily Harambee (“come together”) Unity Circle assemblies and planned activities as a part of the Rites of Passage are integral aspects of the African Centered Education philosophy. The Unity Circle will begin each school morning and the entire school is expected to participate. The Unity Circle starts as follows:

- Drumming—calling the students and staff to be mindful of Afrocentric values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and remembering the contributions of our African and African-American ancestors starting with singing the Negro Anthem
- Students recite the Pittsburgh Miller school pledge
- Solute Bandera Flag
- Recite the Pledge of Allegiance
- Teachers draw attention to any school announcements
- Principal greetings, acknowledgements and announcements
- School-wide Instructional Focus to set the tone for learning.

Ceremonies:

- Kwanzaa will be celebrated
- Birthdays of African-Americans who contributed to our society will be celebrated.

- School, family and community dinners will be used as a way to practice the values and principles, particularly Umoja/Unity, the School’s annual dinner
- Rites of Passage ceremony
- Periodic parent/community member recognition ceremonies
- Fifth Grade Graduation Ceremony – parents and other relatives and friends are invited to the ceremony and afterward they can join the school staff and students for a fellowship snack and to take pictures and meet other parents.

Dress and Personal Appearance

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 has a mandatory dress code. This code was arrived at by the Parent and Community School Council in 1995. Students are expected to be clean and well groomed every day. This means bathed, hair neatly combed, properly fitting shoes. Cleanliness goes a long way in helping children to feel good about themselves and to be more focused in the classroom.

What is appropriate dress?

- Navy blue or khaki pants, slacks, skirts, jumpers, dresses, knee length shorts
- White, navy blue, khaki or black socks
- Black, brown, or blue dress shoes (tennis shoes are allowed)
- White, navy blue, or khaki sweaters.

Parents are expected to adhere to this policy, and not create problems for their children. There will be incentives for students who are in compliance. If any parent cannot afford to purchase uniforms, a school Elder, will provide uniforms for the students.

Breakfast and Lunch Programs

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 is a schoolwide Title I School and will provide meals for all students. Breakfast begins at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 8 a.m. Lunch begins at 11:20 a.m. through 1:05 p.m.

To qualify for free or reduced meals, parents must complete the Application for Free or Reduced Meals each year, usually at the start of the school year.

Student Health and Wellness

Any child requiring medication at school must

have a note from the parent and doctor granting permission and instructions to the office. Medication that has been prescribed to assist in academic focus for particular students may be distributed by a designated staff person. Parents will be notified if injury or illness occurs.

ACADEMICS

Academic Resources Available to Students

- After-school Program
- Tutoring Services
- Mentoring Program
- Extended Day Enrichment (2:40-5:00)
- Extended Year Program—Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 participates in extended year activity by way of Summer School, providing support for students in need of intensive academic help or who want to participate in the school's summer recreation program. The summer program is generally held at Pittsburgh Weil from the first week in July ending the last week in July. However, dates are subject to change.
- Student Support Team
- Support Services and Testing
- Gifted Education and Enrichment
- Learning Support
- Response to Intervention

Standardized Tests

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 assesses student progress with the Pennsylvania State Standards Assessment (PSSA) for Grades 3, 4 and 5; and the Dibels for grades K-5.

Pupil Assessment

Students will be assessed on a nine-week basis with student-led conferences to promote effective parent-teacher-student involvement, responsibility and accountability. The report will list the expected outcomes from Pre-K to kindergarten on non-graded cards, and first grade through fifth with graded reports.

If a student shows signs of having difficulty in an area, parental contacts and follow-ups will be made by the teacher along with a weekly progress report. Students may also be referred to go through the Response to Intervention process for remediation by assigned teachers. Student progress is measured by:

- PSSA—3rd, 4th and 5th grades
- Teacher created oral and written test
- Core reading and math unit assessments

- Observations and assessments of anecdotal records
- Daily classroom formal assessments
- Checklists
- Rating scales and participation charts
- Performance based assessment of portfolios
- Interviews
- Rubrics
- Writing
- Self-assessments and peer group evaluation
- Student demonstrations of critical thinking and problem-solving competencies in a variety of projects and performances to include science, math, Young Authors, and African and African-American history projects.

Behavioral Goal

The social goal of Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 is to provide a holistic educational program that will produce students who are academically and socially competent, conscious, caring and committed by conveying the qualities of self awareness, critical thinking, and purpose. The social goals will be assessed by community involvement, creative projects and economic development. Activities include but are not limited to African Drumming and Dance, Newsletter, Science Club/ Fair, Community Service, Chess Club, Drama and Art, School Choir, Book Clubs. Mastery of these goals shall produce future world leaders.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 affords parents opportunities to support their children and the school in many ways:

Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)

Parents participate in the monthly planning of the PTO agenda at the end of each PTO event. In addition, they provide uniforms for students whose parents cannot afford to purchase uniforms or if students are new to our school and unaware of the uniform policy. The PTO is also a major fundraiser in order to sponsor school events, and helps cover the cost of field trips. Many PTO parents also accompany the drummers and dancers to their performances.

Teacher Conferences

Teachers meet with parents face-to-face and hold telephone conferences throughout the school year to address pressing issues of learning behavior or conduct issues. Two to three times a year parents are asked to participate in a parent and teacher conference. At that time, parents have an opportunity to review with the teacher their child's school progress and address any concerns the parent may have or the teacher may have. Both teacher and parents may discuss and set goals or just explore the classroom.

Parent Volunteers

Opportunities exist daily for parents to volunteer their time and skills to benefit Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5's student population. Parents are especially active in the lower primary grades, K-3, engaging in activities such as lunchroom monitor or chaperones for field trips. Parents also participate in the school's annual poetry workshop, support K-5 school-wide projects by donating food for food drives and fundraising activities (selling holiday cards, candy, no-bake baking sales, pizzas and hoagies), and attendance at school functions such as the school's annual fashion show, Unity Dinner and school carnival.

Parent School Community Council

The goal of the Parent School Community Council is to provide all stakeholders with an opportunity to meet and work collaboratively on behalf of the students and the school. We will strive to build reciprocal relationships with all stakeholders and we strongly encourage active participation and involvement at our monthly meetings.

Family Math Night

An initiative started in the 1999-2000 school year to assist parents in understanding how to support their children with math homework assignments and to familiarize parents with the new math concepts. This event occurs quarterly in the evening and is attended by both the parent and student.

Community Partnerships to Support Students

Community involvement is valued and achieved through the extended day, mentoring, tutoring, career club, school gardening, and after-school programs (onsite and at community-based and faith-based partners). Partners include Carnegie Mellon University, City Parks and Recreation, Breach Menders, Strong Women, Strong Girls, Allegheny County Drug and Alcohol Prevention (Community Intensive Services), Mercy Behavioral Health, Bethel

A.M.E. Church, Grace Memorial Church, Wesley Center & Church, Hill House, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Arts in Residence and many other community partners. Through these partnerships, Pittsburgh Miller PreK-5 is also very active in supporting the community that hosts the school. Activities include community art projects and community gardening projects that engage whole communities.

CODE OF CONDUCT

3 B's

This applies to our expectations regarding how students are to behave in order to have a safe and orderly learning environment. When students choose to violate a rule, a color-coded behavior level system is in place to identify the specific behavior that is out of rule compliance. Each behavior Level has a matching consequence called an intervention. Students should follow the classroom rules of their individual teachers.

An incentive program is in place to acknowledge students who are consistently in compliance with school-wide rules.

Golden Rules are to be:

- Safe
- Respectful
- Cooperative

While we believe that positive reinforcement for good behavior is the best foundation for school discipline, students must know that negative behavior leads to negative consequences. The following consequences may result from disciplinary infractions:

- After or before-school detention.
- Time Out, Redirecting, Loss of Privileges
- Alternative Learning Center, suspension, or detention will be considered.
- In-school suspension.
(Students are placed in other classrooms.)
- Out-of-school suspension.
- Loss of play or activity time.
- Placement at the Alternative Learning Center

For more information, refer to the Code of Student Conduct included in the welcome packet.

It is our goal to ensure that all of our students are able to demonstrate personal responsibility and respect for others in school and during school activities. As a result, we will provide opportunities on a daily basis for students to practice the seven Nguzo Saba Principles, which helps them develop personal responsibility.

- UMOJA (unity)
To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
- KUJICHAGULIA (self-determination)
To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.
- UJIMA (collective work and responsibility)
To build and maintain our community together and to solve our problems together.
- UJAMAA (cooperative economics)
To build, maintain and to profit from our own shops, stores, and other businesses.
- NIA (purpose)
To make our collective vocation the building and development of our community.
- KUUMBA (creativity)
To always do the best we can to leave our community more beautiful than we inherited it.
- IMANI (faith)
Believe in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

