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Prospect Latin School immerses preschoolers in language, music, more

Private academy has 72 students on rolls

By Chris Otts
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The Courier-Journal

In one room at the Prospect Latin School, Nadia Islam is using animal puppets to teach 3-year-olds such Latin words as "canis," which means dog.

In another room, 3-year-olds are sitting at piano keyboards as Sarah Martin teaches them to press the keys every quarter-note.

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Elsewhere, 4-year-olds mix baking soda, clay, vinegar and water to make a bubbling "volcano" in a bottle.

The preschool on U.S. 42, which opened in March and is in its first full year, is unique for teaching Latin and also for its piano program, said Diane Deitel, head of school.

Other schools in Jefferson County teach Latin, such as the

Highlands Latin School, but Prospect is the only preschool to do so, Deitel said.

The private, Christian school had only 13 students in the spring but now has 72 2- to 4-year-olds, Deitel said. The school hopes to have about 120 students in the next year or two, she said.



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Prospect Latin School, 8907 U.S. 42, had only 13 students in the spring but hopes to have about 120 in the next year or two.

MORE PHOTOS

Prospect Latin School

PROSPECT LATIN SCHOOL

Where: 8907 U.S. 42.

Who: 2- to 4-year-olds.

Information: www.prospectlatinschool.org or 292-0123.

Tuition: \$3,141 to \$6,570, depending on attendance schedule.

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The school was about five years in the making, said Theresa Byrne, its founder and the former owner of the Plainview School.

Latin and music are only part of the school's curriculum: Students also learn Spanish, science and social studies.

The school's name reflects a well-rounded, "classical" education, Deitel said.

But the teaching philosophy is hardly traditional. Teachers let the children play, and they use the children's interests to introduce new concepts.

The "volcano" experiment, for example, came about after one student mentioned volcanoes, teacher Hannah Schardein said. By measuring how much baking soda or water to mix together, the students are improving their math skills while doing something that keeps their interest, she said.

The teachers document their activities with digital cameras and make photo displays around the classroom explaining what's been going on; and photos are included in weekly newsletters for parents

The school doesn't subject the preschoolers to the rigors of learning how sentences are formed in Latin but simply the vocabulary.

More than half the words in the Romance languages, including English and Spanish, are derived from Latin. Though it might seem odd to teach a dead language to preschoolers, they are well-suited to learn Latin because of their capacity for absorbing information, Deitel said.

"We're hoping that years from now, when they're studying for their SATs, they'll remember some of these words," she said.

Sarah Rueff said her son Jackson, 3, will often refer to things in their kitchen by their Spanish words, and that he knows Latin words that she didn't, such as the words for "star," "sun" and "moon."

Martin, the music teacher, said she's teaching the children the difference between quarter-notes and rests and between the black and white keys on the piano. Soon they'll learn which keys correspond to which notes, with the goal of playing a simple song by the end of the year, she said.

The school's Latin and piano programs hold promise, said Barbara Burns, a developmental psychologist at the University of Louisville.

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Burns studied the two programs, which Byrne developed, when they were temporarily implemented at Plainview. Verbal and math test scores improved after students had a year in each program, but the study was limited and not definitive, Burns said.

Reporter Chris Otts can be reached at (502) 582-4589.

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