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PRESS RELEASE

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Upland Unified's StepUp Preschool Sets Foundation for Lifelong Learning Through Inclusive Model

UPLAND – Upland Unified School District's StepUp Preschool prepares its youngest learners for school and life through an inclusive introduction to education. With approximately 150 spaces available each year, StepUp offers an innovative learning environment where children with special needs and their neurotypical peers learn side by side.

StepUp Preschool is designed for three-year-olds and serves as a bridge into California's universal transitional kindergarten for four-year-olds. Students are eligible to begin on their third birthday, and families may choose between morning (8:30 to 11:30 a.m.) or afternoon (noon to 3:30 p.m.) sessions, Monday through Thursday.

StepUp distinguishes itself through its commitment to inclusion. By creating classrooms that reflect the diversity of learners in the world, children gain early exposure to different perspectives, strengths, and needs. This helps all students develop empathy, social skills, and a strong sense of community while building the academic and pre-academic skills needed for future success.

"StepUp is not just a preschool program. It is a community where every child feels seen, valued, and supported," Coordinator Mathew Kodama said. "Our inclusive model benefits every child in the classroom. Students with special needs are given the opportunity to build friendships and confidence, while neurotypical peers develop compassion, leadership, and an understanding of diversity that stays with them. Together, they create a culture of acceptance and belonging that truly prepares them for life beyond preschool."

Each class is led by a credentialed teacher and supported by at least two paraprofessionals, ensuring individualized attention for each student. The program's seven credentialed teachers hold degrees in both special and general education and are supported by 18 paraprofessionals. This staffing model allows for two types of classes: blended classes of up to 15 students (seven with special needs and eight neurotypical learners) and smaller classes for students who require more intensive support.

"The inclusive environment at StepUp has shaped our daughter in the most beautiful ways," StepUp parents Alex and Regina Castaneda said. "She grew in confidence, communication, and kindness because she was welcomed with warmth and high expectations. Being in a classroom where every child belongs taught her empathy and community in a way we could never have taught alone."

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StepUp didn't just prepare her academically, it helped her grow socially and emotionally in ways that will serve her for life."

The program emphasizes exploratory and play-based learning, aligned with California's Preschool and Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations. Children are introduced to core subjects through engaging, hands-on experiences that strengthen pre-academic and academic skills. Alongside these foundational skills, the staff places a strong focus on social-emotional development and intentional community-building, ensuring students leave preschool prepared for transitional kindergarten (TK) and beyond.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

UUSD_StepUpPreschool1: StepUp Preschool teacher Patricia Snively works on letter recognition with three-year-old students, laying the foundation for literacy that will prepare them for success in transitional kindergarten.

UUSD_StepUpPreschool2: Upland Unified's StepUp Preschool provides three-year-olds like Ethan Martinez the opportunity to develop fine motor skills and exercise imagination through exploratory play.

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