



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY

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## DoDEA Pacific begins Universal Prekindergarten

DoDEA Pacific launched Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) this week at its 23 primary schools in Guam, Korea, mainland Japan and Okinawa.

Four-year-old students hugged and high-fived their parents “goodbye” before walking through the doors of DoDEA schools across the region.

“Welcoming Universal Prekindergarten into our school communities is an exciting milestone, and the success of this first week is just the beginning,” said Ms. Lois Rapp, DoDEA Pacific Director for Student Excellence. “We are looking forward to supporting the growth and development of our youngest learners throughout this year.”

Schools marked the occasion with support from military leaders and parents. Special events such as “Cry and Bye” and “Boo Hoo Breakfast” connected moms and dads of UPK students as their children began their educational journey.

At Yokosuka Primary School, the event was celebrated with a “Ringing In” ceremony. United States Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, U.S. Seventh Fleet Commander Vice Adm. Fred Kacher, Navy Region Japan Commander Rear Adm. Ian Johnson, and Pacific Region Director for Student Excellence Ms. Lois Rapp spent time with students and families after signifying the start of the school year with the ringing of a bell.

At Mendel Elementary School, U.S. Forces Japan Commander Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp, 374<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, Installation Commander Col. Richard McElhaney, and Mr. Incredible (a.k.a. Principal Bob Panitzke) greeted parents and students on the first day of UPK.

Prekindergarten students at Bob Hope Elementary School were greeted with sidewalk chart art wishing them a great first day. They started their first day exploring their classroom, learning routines and getting to know their classmates.

Osan Elementary School’s prekindergarten students participated in engaging, interactive activities during their first school day. They practiced fine motor skills with creative projects in the classroom and gross motor skills on the playground.

In order to be ready for the launch of UPK this week, DoDEA first prepared its facilities and staff. The DoDEA logistics team worked diligently throughout the summer months to prepare classrooms for UPK, arranging delivery and assembly of approximately 37,000 items including furniture, curricular materials, and kitchen utensils to support family-style dining.

Universal Prekindergarten educators, Preschool Services for Children with Disabilities teachers, and educational aides engaged in hands-on professional learning in August. During this training, participants focused on DoDEA's College and Career Ready Standards and UPK alignment, including learning more about DoDEA's adopted UPK curriculum, The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, best practices for inclusion, strategies and resources for family engagement, and developmentally appropriate student-centered learning environments. Participants also visited a model UPK classroom, experiencing how a UPK classroom helps facilitate learning for our youngest DoDEA students.

All children who meet DoDEA eligibility requirements and turn four years old on or before Sept. 1, 2024, are eligible to register for UPK. For more information about UPK, visit [dodea.edu/UPK](https://dodea.edu/UPK).



Pacific East District Universal Prekindergarten educators, Preschool Services for Children with Disabilities teachers, and educational aides engage in hands-on professional learning.



Ms. Rapp welcomes Universal Prekindergarten students and parents on the first day of UPK at Yokosuka Primary School on Sept. 4, 2024.



U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel participates in carpet time with UPK students at Yokosuka Primary School on Sept. 4, 2024.



Mr. Incredible (a.k.a. Principal Panitzke) greets families on the first day of UPK at Mendel Elementary School Sept. 4, 2024.



Bob Hope Elementary School UPK students form a line and wave “goodbye” to their parents on Sept. 4, 2024.





Students learn three ways they can sit on the carpet on the first day of UPK at Bob Hope Elementary School Sept. 4, 2024.



U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp, U.S. Forces Japan and 5th Air Force commander, high-fives a student during the first day of universal pre-kindergarten at Yokota Air Base, Japan, Sept. 4, 2024. Department of Defense Education Activity pre-kindergarten helps prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond by building foundational abilities in language, literacy and math. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Alexzandra Gracey)