

Discovery at WHEDco's Pre-K is Family Centered



Hands-on learning at the Urban Horizons Early Childhood Discovery Center (WHEDco)

While WHEDco's [Urban Horizons Early Childhood Discovery Center](#) focuses on preparing children for Kindergarten, they are also completely committed to engaging and supporting the child's family as well. Urban Horizons views assisting parents in their day-to-day lives as an integral part of developing a child's ability to succeed.

The Pre-K run by the [Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation](#) (WHEDco) is a free Head Start program for three and four year-olds, with [applications currently being accepted](#) for four-year-olds.

Silvana Vasconcelos, the Director of the Urban Horizons Center, told [thisistheBronX](#) that virtual education has actually supported the mission of including families in their children's education and WHEDco welcomes parent input into the process.

"Because of remote learning we are doing focus groups where we ask parents, 'What did you learn here?'" Vasconcelos said. "We send the videos of the teachers giving the lessons. Then they watch the lessons, do their activity with the children, and send us

back the video. It's very gratifying to see the videos of the kids and what they are doing at home with their parents."

Urban Horizons, a Head Start Program under contract with the Dept. of Education, has served the Morrisania community for more than 20 years. WHEDco follows a pre-K curriculum published by the DOE, focusing on play and project-based learning. Vasconcelos calls it "very hands-on" and welcoming beginning with the first meeting with enrollment staff all the way through enrollment in Kindergarten.

The services for entire families are extensive: there's a food pantry, mental health supports, and a family childcare program. There's also an emphasis on nutrition with farm-to-table programs that provide organic eggs and vegetables and access to immigration consultations.

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The personalization of the family experience at Urban Horizons is personal for the director, too. She says she's been working in lesson planning since her son started pre-K in the 1990's. She truly believes that a child's education should be a familial experience.

"When my my son was three, I started creating curriculum for parents and children together. I started writing family literacy programs in libraries for 12 years," Vasconcelos said. "Observing a human being develop and learn, it's so rewarding. It's rich. It gives me a sense that it's worth going through all the challenges we go through in life."

Enrollment into the [Early Childhood Discovery Center](#) is free and open to families and children who are qualified according to federal income guidelines. WHEDco also accepts children who are categorically eligible: children who live in shelters, are in foster care, and/or are receiving federal benefits.

WHEDco's nationally-accredited Urban Horizons Early Childhood Discovery Center, an EarlyLearn NYC Head Start program, serves 111 preschool children from 20 different countries.

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