

LOCALNEWS

Filling a need

District adds preschool section

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

The International Falls school district saw a need and filled it.

After a preschool sign-up event in February, more than 20 students were placed on a waiting with the prospect of into the program. At the time, Falls Superintendent Kevin Grover said the district would consider its options and hopefully would be able to find a place for those students.

Last week, the Falls School Board hired an additional teacher, wiping the waiting list slate clean.

“I’m excited,” Grover said. “I’m a true believer that getting kids in a structured program early will pay benefits.”

Karla Olson-Line will take the fourth section of preschool, which will be an all day, 4-year-old class offered Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Grover said the all-day format seemed to be in the highest demand.

“I am very excited to be joining the teaching fam-

ily at ISD 361,” Olson-Line said. “Education has always been my passion and I am a firm believer that knowledge is power... As an early educator I will help guide children toward goals associated with managing emotions, behaviors and following classroom rules. As an educator and parent, I want each child to know that they are cared for and loved. This is an exciting new journey for myself and my family.”

A little help

While Grover expressed his excitement about expanding the district’s preschool offerings, he noted it does come with a price tag.

“Right now, the district is bearing the cost,” he said, adding the district does receive some school readiness dollars, but for the most part the program’s expenses come from the general fund.



Karla Olson-Line

The superintendent is among many school administrators across the state keeping their fingers crossed that something comes from a proposal by Gov. Mark Dayton to invest in the state’s preschool programs.

The governor has proposed to devote \$343 million of the state’s projected \$1.9 billion surplus in universal preschool for 4-year-olds and another \$695 million for pre-K-12 education.

“I’m keeping a close eye on it,” Grover said of the governor’s proposal. “My hope is there will be some money put toward preschool.”

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Education released a report showing a growing need for high-quality public preschool options across the nation.

The report, A Matter of Equity: Preschool in America, shows that of the four million 4-year olds in the United States, about 60 percent – or nearly 2.5 million – are not enrolled in publicly funded preschool programs, including state

preschool programs, Head Start and programs serving children with disabilities. Minnesota numbers in the report are some of the lowest in the country, with 61,430 kids – or 81 percent – not enrolled in a publicly funded program.

“A robust body of research shows that children who participate in high-quality preschool programs have better health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes than those who do not participate,” the report said. “The gains are particularly powerful for children from low-income families and those at risk for academic failure who, on average, start kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind their peers in pre-literacy and language skills. Children who attend high-quality preschool programs... are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and succeed in their careers than those who have not attended high-quality preschool programs. Research also suggests that expanding early learning – including

high-quality preschool – provides society with a return on investment of \$8.60 for every \$1 spent.”

In response to the report, Minnesota Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius said, “Every child deserves access to high-quality early learning programs. This report is a critical reminder of the inequity that exists for 4-year-olds throughout our nation and here in Minnesota. Over the past four years we have made gains in strengthening early learning opportunities for Minnesota children, from investing in free, full-day kindergarten for every child to increasing access to high quality childcare. Still, Minnesota remains at the bottom of the nation for providing public preschool options, and often the high costs of care and education programs act as barriers for too many families.”

In addition, Cassellius said the governor’s budget proposes investments in children, providing universal pre-K to every 4-year-old in the state. This effort,

along with increased funding for Head Start and the Child Care Assistance Program for working families, would transform the way young learners are served and ensure every child has a great start to an excellent education.

Ahead of the game

Grover said he is optimistic some type of funding will flourish to benefit preschool programs, and he is proud the Falls district is already offering a quality program.

“We already have licensed instructors in our preschool classroom,” he said. “That is something that will be required as funding becomes available and we are already there.”

The superintendent stressed the importance of early learning and said he’s had conversations with the district’s kindergarten teachers who are finding children who don’t attend preschool first are falling behind their peers.

“Kids are sponges at an early age,” he said. “The more we can get to them academically, the better off we are.”

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