



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Wade E. Lucas

DATE: December 14, 2011

SUBJECT: All-Day, Every Day Kindergarten at Olentangy Local Schools

For the 2011-12 school year, Olentangy has implemented a limited all-day, every day kindergarten program at Heritage Elementary School. Developed in response to a state mandate (since repealed), this program had been put in place to operate for one year, with consideration of its feasibility to continue. Over the past several months, an administrative task force has examined the practicality of continuing this program; all aspects of the decision have been researched. The following summary outlines the history, costs, and benefits of an all-day, every day kindergarten program, and will clarify Olentangy’s decision regarding continuation of this program beyond the current school year.

History

Olentangy Local Schools has considered the option of an all-day every day kindergarten program in the past, but with our explosive growth, implementing such a program has been impractical from both facility and staffing standpoints.

When the state’s previous biennium budget bill (HB 1) passed in Spring 2009, it included a mandate for all Ohio school districts to provide all-day, every day kindergarten. The existing building capacity could not accommodate this mandate without the construction of an additional elementary school building. To avoid going to voters for additional funding necessary for construction, the district appealed to the Ohio Department of Education for a temporary waiver from implementation of this mandate.

The district received a waiver that permitted Olentangy to phase in the new kindergarten program. The first stage of the agreement required an all-day, every day kindergarten to serve approximately 300 students in the highest academic-need categories, beginning with the 2011-12 school year.

Kindergarten registration for the 2011-12 school year began in January 2011. In Spring 2011, Ohio lawmakers officially repealed the existing mandate for all-day, every day kindergarten. As Olentangy was already well into the hiring and registration processes, the district felt it was important to honor its promise to parents and offer the program for at least the 2011-12 school year.

At the current time, the limited all-day, every day kindergarten program operates in the new Heritage Elementary School. The program serves approximately 330 students and adds about \$500,000 to the budget in additional personnel costs. The cost of transporting the students is in addition to the staffing expense.

Looking Ahead

Since the repeal of the all-day, every day kindergarten mandate, Olentangy has been considering the future of this program. The district must balance the positive aspects of this program with the financial and facility challenges it presents.

Academic Benefit

We are proud of the work Principal Susan Staum and her staff have done to create a solid curriculum and supportive experience for the students in the Heritage Elementary all-day, every day kindergarten program. It will take several years before Olentangy can begin to gauge whether or not this program will have a profound impact on the academic performance and social development of participating students.

In the meantime, the district has also looked to outside research to estimate such a program's academic benefits. While some studies suggest a significant benefit, others do not. Without a clear consensus from researchers as to how an all-day, every day program may impact students' futures, the district turned to existing data on its own student body, most of which participated in the standard all-day, every-other-day Olentangy kindergarten program.

The most recent Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card shows high achievement in all of Olentangy's elementary schools. In fact, each building is rated either *Excellent* or *Excellent with Distinction*. This achievement mirrors that of Olentangy elementary students over the past several years.

Additionally, Olentangy recognizes that all-day, every day kindergarten programs are available through several private daycare facilities and preschools in the area.

Facilities

Classroom space is always an issue at Olentangy Schools. The district's enrollment has grown at a rapid rate; starting with one building 21 years ago, Olentangy currently has 23 school buildings. For the past eight years, Olentangy has been the fastest growing school district in the state, in what has become the fastest growing county in the state.

Currently, Olentangy does not have the classroom space to expand the all-day, every day kindergarten program district-wide. Similarly, the district does not have the option of continuing the limited program at Heritage Elementary School; in order to accommodate the expanding student population, this building will need to be a traditional kindergarten-through-fifth grade school for the 2012-13 school year.

One option which was considered was to place one section of all-day, every day kindergarten in each elementary building (still serving approximately 330 students district-wide). However, this plan also has significant drawbacks. First, it increases the need for kindergarten seats in each building, decreasing the space available for students in upper grades. As a result, a greater number of students would have to be redistricted. In addition, this scenario would also accelerate the need to construct Elementary #16. The following chart details the projected construction of E #16, based on the operation of an all-day, every day kindergarten program for 20% of the district's kindergarten students.

Timeline for Construction of Elementary #16			
% of district kindergarten students in all-day, every day program		20%	0%
Students per section	22	2014-15	2015-16
	23	2017-18	2018-19

While voters have already approved the bond issue that will pay for Elementary #16's construction, operating costs are not included in the financial forecast until the 2014-15 school year; taxpayers would have to fund this additional expense sooner. Finally, the interest in an all-day every day program may not be uniform across the district. This could mean that one school may have 50 families on a waiting list, while another school may have merely 10 or 12 interested families.

Cost

The current, limited all-day, every day kindergarten program costs the district approximately \$500,000 per year, plus the cost of transportation. Continuation of this limited program, distributed in classes throughout all 15 elementary schools, does not reduce the \$500,000 in personnel costs.

While this cost was factored into the 2011-12 budget, current conditions will make it far more difficult to factor this expense into budgets for 2012-13 and beyond.

- In late spring 2011, the district learned it would lose approximately \$7.2 million in state revenue due to changes in the state budget.
- By early fall 2011, we learned that we would lose an additional \$2.4 million dollars in property tax dollars based upon the local property revaluation.

The district is committed to find ways to overcome these losses without going back to the voters for additional funds, while protecting the quality of its overall academic program.

A new provision in state law allows school districts to collect tuition for an all-day, every day program. This option was considered for Olentangy by the task force. It was determined that, while this could potentially offset the personnel costs for a limited program, the district could not charge enough to offset the costs of the additional facilities that would be needed. A high tuition cost could create a “haves versus have-nots” situation, potentially resulting in students with a greater academic need unable to afford the program.

Conclusion

Olentangy is pleased with the success of the current all-day, every day kindergarten program at Heritage Elementary School. The Heritage staff has worked diligently to create a quality program offering students additional support both academically and socially. However, research about the long-term academic benefits of this type of program remains inconclusive, and there are numerous serious and long-reaching financial and facility implications to consider when deciding if it is feasible to maintain, or even expand, this program.

At this time, without clear academic benefits, and in consideration of the financial limitations of the district and our local taxpayers, the responsible decision is to discontinue this program after the 2011-12 school year. I am confident that this decision is the best one for the students, families and taxpayers of the Olentangy Local School District.