

Parents still have questions, concerns about all-day kindergarten options

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A lot remains up in the air about the pilot all-day kindergarten program slated to begin in 2001-02 at William Grace Elementary School. But Principal Mark Morawski Friday said he is encouraged by the number of children to be signed up during kindergarten registration week.

As of Friday afternoon, Morawski said 21 youngsters were signed up for all-day kindergarten; parents of just two children were "undecided" about enrolling all-day or half-days.

Questions raised during

Wednesday night's informational meeting still need to be answered, however. Those include how many all-day sections would be set up and whether half-day kindergartners would attend at William Grace or perhaps Alameda Early Childhood Center.

Morawski did say enough have signed up to ensure one section. "The numbers are fantastic," he said, about early registration. "We usually get 10 during the whole week and now we're up to 21. ... They will trickle in for the rest of this year and a good number will register in August."

Firm decisions about placement of kindergartners probably

won't be made until after a meeting in late March between elementary school principals and Larry Lobert, executive director of human resources.

Parents would subsequently be notified about kindergarten placement. Kindergarten Orientation throughout the district is scheduled for Friday, April 27.

"We don't want to leave these parents hanging, either,"

Morawski said. "We want to make a decision as timely as we can."

Meanwhile, Morawski said about 35 parents attended the informational meeting with all but five expressing support for the program.

Of those five, who want to know whether the half-day option will remain available at William Grace, only two have

children entering kindergarten in fall 2001, when the pilot program begins.

One of the other parents with concerns about the pilot program is Michelle Keener, who wants her preschool-age daughter attending traditional half-day kindergarten — at her home school — when she is eligible to go to William Grace in the 2002-03 school year.

"I think it's a wonderful thing for a lot of kids," Keener said. "But they're not giving us a choice. It's a numbers game."

The best solution, Keener added, would be "to have both" kindergarten programs at William Grace.

She is not thrilled with sending her child to Alameda, either. "I made a choice to stay home with my children and I feel I have as much right to have my child at the home school."

Morawski said no pressure is being placed on parents about all-day kindergarten. "We're convinced this is a benefit, but the parent knows their kid best. We would never pressure anyone into going a full day."

Keener sees it differently.

"I know we're not going to win," she said. "But my silence would be like saying I agree, and I don't. ... I just don't understand why they're so inflexible."

'I think it's a wonderful thing for a lot of kids. But they're not giving us a choice. It's a numbers game.'

*Michelle Keener
—William Grace parent*

Roast from A1

mark the return of both long-ago festival traditions to downtown locations. Although the Elks Club hosted the popular ox roast and tent in recent years, Hartsock said the last time both were stationed downtown was 1979.

"I think it's going to be very successful," Hartsock said. "I was at the information booth last year, ... and as long as we've not had the ox roast, people have said 'Where is it?' And, at last year's town hall meeting (about the festival), people said they wanted it back. It gives identity to the festival."

Lichtman, following the meeting, called the council's approval of the permit "a good milestone" toward helping the Founders Festival reclaim past glory as a community staple.

The 2000 festival, under the leadership of promoter Mike Watts, took place in June and was known as the Farmington Area Family Fest. Both of those changes from tradition were not well-received by residents and merchants.

Carleigh Flaherty, president of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, said "It's probably the most popular call we get every year (about the festival). 'Are we going to have an ox roast?'"

Even though alcohol will be served in the hospitality tent, officials assured that the area will be closely monitored to minimize chances of patrons getting drunk.

"I talked to (restaurant owner) Dennis Page," said Hartsock during the meeting. "It will be staged behind his restaurant, with a lot of help from the Jaycees. Hopefully, it will be viewed as a hospitality tent and not a beer tent."

"That's important, because we're trying to keep this a family event."

City Manager Frank Laubhoff added that one possibility to keep festival-goers from drinking excessively is by charging more money for alcoholic beverages. "This is not going to be inexpensive."

Special outdoor liquor control license permits will be set up through Lichtman, who recently took over as festival administrator from Watts' successor, Bruce Lilley.

The permit requested that the municipal parking lot also be used on Wednesday, July 18 for the Miss Farmington Pageant event.

In addition, council approved Lichtman's request to:

- Close Shawnee between Power and Farmington roads between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. for the July 19 "Kids Day in the Park";

- Authorize the public safety department to apply for a grant required to close Grand River from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. July 21 for the festival parade;

- Adopt a resolution holding the state transportation department harmless for liability connected with closing Grand River for the parade.

Beechview alum essay contest begins

The Beechview Elementary School PTA again is offering a \$500 college scholarship to a former Beechview student.

Beechview alumni can pick up applications at their high school counselor's office at Farmington, Harrison or North Farmington high schools.

It is the fifth year of the program, said PTA spokeswoman Kathy McFarland. Applicants are asked to write about a particular topic, with those essays then reviewed by a committee.

McFarland said the scholarship recipient will be invited to an end-of-the-year assembly when the scholarship award will be presented.

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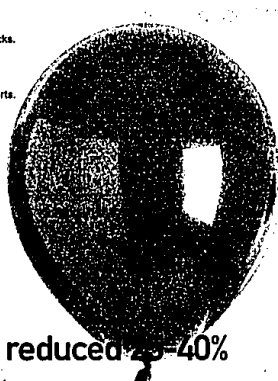
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