

All-day kindergarten pilot, pre-school options OK'd

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The look of early childhood and kindergarten programs in Farmington Public Schools will begin changing as soon as 2001-02, following Tuesday's approval by the board of education of a multi-faceted list of recommendations.

The early childhood recommendations, introduced to the school board in mid-December and spurred by three years of committee work, were unanimously approved.

Some of the main recommendations are as follows:

■ Piloting all-day kindergarten in 2001-02, where kindergartners would attend for a full day.

■ Expanding preschool options at Alameda and Fairview early childhood centers, with an examination of phasing out first and second grades at Alameda. (Fairview is only preschool through kindergarten.)

Superintendent Bob Maxfield gave some assurances to preschool parents following Tuesday's meeting, however.

"Those who are currently in kindergarten at Alameda (whose parents) want them to stay there in first and second grade will have priority," Maxfield said. He added that parents will be able to attend meetings at both centers.

■ Enabling families more preschool opportunities and programs at their "home" schools, with priority space for a limited period of time.

■ Serving as the lead district in a southWest Oakland County consortium for the Parent Involvement and Education grant. PIE focuses on children up to age 5 and their families, supports children getting an earlier jump on learning and provides funding for the Parent as Teachers Program. The Farmington district applied for PIE grant dollars, which is part of state Public Act 297.

■ Promoting additional training for new and existing staff in the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile, and expanding that training through second grade.

■ Develop "hubs" for the Educare program, to provide equitable access across the district.

■ Address potential overcrowding, by going to "buddy" schools, examining boundaries where necessary and filling home school kindergarten classes first.

"Basically, we want to do a

better job identifying who are kindergarten-eligible families," said Maxfield. "They will enroll at their home schools. And, if they feel Fairview or Alameda are a better site for their child - assuming the home school slots are full - they will go back to the early childhood center."

Judy White, the district's assistant superintendent for instruction, said it is crucial for more to be done to connect younger children with learning.

THE SCHOOLS

"It's the next step in Farmington," White said. "We say we're becoming the premier district of the 21st century, and we're looking from (ages) zero-to-five and connecting that to" subsequent grades.

"From the minute a child is born to when a child is in our district, it's part of what we need

to do in schooling. With what we know about brain research, the early years are so important for what is set in motion for a child's life."

About all-day kindergarten, top questions needing to be answered during a pilot program include how much children benefit from additional time and support, White continued. "And would that raise academic achievement?"

Connecting early

The board's unanimous approval followed a comprehensive rundown of the recommendations by Fairview Principal Kathy Obrizak during the previous meeting on Dec. 19.

During that meeting, school board Trustee Bobbie Feldman applauded the recommendations of the early childhood committee, of which Obrizak is a member.

"We've stepped up and really

professionalized the field of early childhood, with marketing and supporting staff development," Feldman said. "But it's also important we support parents as the first educators of their children, and that came through loud and clear."

Feldman also agreed with the recommendation to try all-day kindergarten. "It's time to pilot it. It's clearly the way we need to go."

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MDOT plans freeway noise meet in Lansing

Farmington and Farmington Hills residents wanting to make their voices heard about the noise on I-275 and the state's policy for when to spend money on sound barriers and other noise abatement methods should mark Feb. 22 on their calendars.

At 9 a.m. on that day, the Michigan Transportation Commission hosts its monthly meeting in Lansing and the agenda includes study of a revision to the state's noise abatement policy and the I-275 noise problem.

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