May 10, 2016

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Residents:

I am happy to provide the community with an update about the kindergarten wrap program, which was conceived as a means to assist our parents in response to the defeated full-day kindergarten special question. Below, you will also find answers to a number of questions circulating in the community.

After the defeat of the full-day kindergarten special question, we heard from many parents and we recognized three common needs. We recognized our future kindergarten parents were seeking (1) to keep their children in the same school for a complete school day with (2) an excellent academic program and (3) at a reasonable cost. With the wrap program, the district is meeting all three needs while also recognizing the will of the voters. Similar programs are thriving in Ramsey and Madison, as well as other high-performing school districts without full-day kindergarten. The program was not designed to serve as a replacement for full-day kindergarten. It was designed to supplement the existing curriculum delivered during our regular half-day program.

As you may know, the wrap model had a very rough start and initially, it was not well-received by a number of residents. There was also a lengthy delay with approval and this led to questions about whether the wrap program would ever be approved. As a result, we were concerned our initial proposal that included 100 seats was overly optimistic.

Despite many setbacks, I am thrilled to report that so many families are now seeing the value of the wrap model. The registration went much better than expected and we could immediately see there was far more demand beyond the original five sections (100 seats). After another evaluation of our facilities, we added three more sections (60 seats) to accommodate up to 160 wrap students. At our last Board of Education meeting held on May 4th, I reported that we had 173 students registered. One day later, that number exploded to 189 registrants, which is almost twice as many students as we originally anticipated.

At this time, we are committed to opening 2 sections of the kindergarten wrap program at Lafayette, Pines Lake and Randall Carter Schools. We will be offering one section of the kindergarten wrap at Fallon and Theunis Dey Schools. These decisions were made based on the availability of space in our elementary schools.

On Monday, May 9th, we notified all families who registered for the kindergarten wrap program of their status. We were able to accommodate all who registered at Pines Lake (includes students from Pines Lake and APT), Lafayette (includes students from Lafayette and JFK) and Randall Carter (includes students from Randall Carter, Packanack, and Ryerson). Unfortunately, we were unable to immediately offer a placement to every family at Fallon and Theunis Dey Schools.
It is important to understand that we are not finished with the kindergarten wrap around program enrollment process because our parents still have decisions to make regarding where they would like to send their children for kindergarten. Prior to the April 21st Board of Education vote to approve the kindergarten wrap around program, many parents had already made plans and submitted down payments for other locations. Some of those parents may simply continue with their pre-existing plans to enroll their children elsewhere. In order to accommodate as many parents as possible, we ask that parents who are declining an offer of enrollment to please notify the school district by Friday, May 13th. Please email Julie Lisella (jlisella@wayneschools.com) and we will promptly refund the $500 down payment back to the credit card used in the transaction.

Based on a lottery, a waiting list was created in each building. This Friday, we will start to use our waiting lists to accommodate additional families with opportunities for attendance. This process will continue through May 23rd.

We appreciate the great interest in our wrap program. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call or write.

Sincerely,

Mark Toback
Superintendent of Schools

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The district often monitors social media questions and comments. Using this information, we developed a FAQ to assist parents.

Q1: How is it possible that a recent study showed there was space available for full-day kindergarten and all of a sudden, the district is now concerned about limited space?
A1: The study indicated that there is space, but at a price. In other words, if full-day kindergarten were implemented, some schools would need to hold art and music classes on a cart. In other cases, specialized classes would need to be moved to other locations. Various steps would need to be taken at each school to make room for full-day kindergarten, including facility work. The district also must consider the additional staffing needed to support the additional kindergarten students. With the introduction of the wrap model, our regular enrollment for our existing half-day kindergarten increased, thus triggering the need to hire additional teachers and other
support staff. Adding an additional 60 seats to accommodate families in excess of the 100 we planned adds to the complexity of the situation.

Q2: Why would the district not make space for kindergarten by simply eliminating some of the Pre-K classes?
A2: The Pre-K classes we offer are required for many of our students and the district does not have the leeway to simply eliminate Pre-K.

Q3: Could other students be moved to make room for additional kindergarten classes?
A3: Yes, but it would be very unusual for any school district to displace a group of students enrolled in required academic programs in order to make space for an optional program. Other parents would likely challenge any adverse impact the wrap program has on the placement of their children.

Q4: Didn't the district commit to placing every registrant?
A4: No, a lottery was part of the planning process from the beginning. The district will be using our waiting list to place additional students on Friday. The immediate placement of all students is not realistic when all factors are considered.

Q5: I received an email indicating that my child was not placed. Is there any hope?
A5: As indicated at the last Board of Education Meeting, we are working to place every student we possibly can, but we will need additional time to sort out where space might be available if parents do not accept offers for enrollment. Yes, there is hope.

Q6: When will we find out if our child is enrolled in the AM or PM wrap session?
A6: Letters indicating AM or PM kindergarten assignments have always been mailed to parents in August. Once regular kindergarten placement letters go out in August, parents will also be notified of their AM or PM placement for the wrap program.