

**To:** Central & East Lawrence Elementary School Consolidation Working Group

**From:** Cris Anderson, Principal  
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**RE:** Early Childhood Programs at Kennedy Elementary

**Background Information:**

Early childhood education has been a topic of discussion for many years within our school district and community. As early as 1990, an early childhood task force recommended that early childhood classrooms be established to address the need of young children not having a quality preschool education prior to entering kindergarten. This task force focused on data collection. The data collected revealed that of the 729 children enrolled in kindergarten in 1990, 225 (31%) children did not have any formal preschool experience. The task force also reported that community centers and preschools serving at-risk preschoolers had extensive waiting lists. The majority of these children were from elementary schools with a high percentage of families who qualified for free and reduced-price lunches.

In spite of our efforts, we still have many children entering school without the benefit of an early childhood experience. One could estimate that each year, approximately 130 children would benefit from the district's At-Risk Early Childhood Program (pre-kindergarten, four-year-olds). Currently, funding allows for the district to serve 96 children in six classrooms. However, due to lack of space at Kennedy Elementary for K-5 classrooms this year, we reduced our number of four-year-olds served to 80 students in five classrooms. It is important that a plan be developed that would not only allow for us to recover the reduction of one classroom, but to expand the program to a total of eight Pre-K classrooms.

**Four-Year-Old At-Risk/Pre-K Program:**

In 1993, Lawrence Public Schools, the Lawrence Schools Foundation and the Lawrence Business/Education Partnership program (now called Lawrence Education Achievement Partners or LEAP) developed a cohort to address the national education goal: "*All Children Will Start School Ready To Learn.*" Private funds supported the full-day early childhood program from 1996-1998. The Kansas State Department of Education began funding the state Four-Year-Old At-Risk Program in 1998, at which time the district received its first four-year-old at-risk grant. From 1998 to present, a combination of the Kansas State Department of Education grant (four-year-old at-risk), community grants and private funds have been used to support this program. The 16-year partnership and coordination of funds have provided a quality early childhood education for approximately 1,400 four-year-old children.

Prior to 2002, classroom-based early childhood programs were scattered throughout the school district at East Heights, Centennial, Pinckney and Woodlawn Elementary Schools, the Adult Learning Center and at the University of Kansas. East Heights Elementary was closed as a cost saving measure in the spring of 2002. Classrooms, once used for early childhood, were needed as district boundaries were adjusted to accommodate students from the East Heights attendance area. In the fall of 2002, East Heights Early Childhood Family Center opened its doors as the district's early childhood center. In 2009, the district closed East Heights, moving the program to the current Kennedy Elementary location.

Families seeking to enroll in the Pre-K program must live within the Lawrence Public Schools' attendance area. The child must be four years of age on or before August 31, of the current year. The other eligibility requirements include:

- the family is eligible for free lunch, **or**
- the family is eligible for reduced-price lunch and one of the following:
  - custodial parent is unmarried
  - family is being referred by SRS
  - child was born to a teen parent
  - parent is lacking a high school diploma or GED
  - child qualifies for migrant status
  - English is the child's second language

Class sizes are limited to sixteen children in a classroom, per our grant requirements. To support the inclusion of children with disabilities, we earmark two slots in each classroom as placement for our early childhood special education teams to place children who qualify for early childhood special education. Each classroom has a full time Kansas-certified teacher. Currently, three of our five teachers hold an endorsement in English as a Second Language (ESL). Children who qualify for ESL support are assigned to a classroom with an ESL teacher. Based on the age (non-school age) of our students, we are required to maintain a 1:12 adult child ratio. In addition to a classroom teacher, each classroom has a full time paraeducator who works closely with the classroom teacher to provide direct instruction and supervision of children.

Eighty-seven percent of the children in our 2011-12 Four-Year-Old At-Risk program qualify for free lunch. We have made a strong effort in enrolling children who otherwise would not be attending a quality preschool due to lack of family resources.

Next year's population is anticipated to show similar at-risk characteristics as did the 2011-12 children enrolled in the program.

**2012-2013 Projection:**

meets one at-risk criteria	meets two at-risk criteria	meets three or more at-risk criteria
17 children	30 children	29 children

Another unique aspect to our early childhood program is educating young English Language Learners (ELLs). Approximately 25% of our students qualify to receive ESL services. Families stating that another language, other than English, is spoken at home complete an Extended Home Language Survey. In addition to the parent survey, a screening is conducted to determine if children qualify for ESL services. Children who qualify for ESL support are assigned to a classroom with an ESL teacher. Our early childhood teachers have been trained to implement

SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol), the district's ESL instructional model, within their direct instruction.

In 2001, the district participated in the state's Four-Year-Old At-Risk study group. This study compared a select group of children from similar backgrounds who did not attend the Readiness Program (control group) to a random group of children who did participate in the program. These children were followed from kindergarten to the beginning of second grade. The Work Sampling System Developmental checklist was used for kindergarten and first grade. The second grade reading diagnostic test was used to record fall performance information. Children who attended the district's readiness program entered and exited kindergarten at a higher level of success than the control group and performed well above grade level. The same groups of children, as first-graders, entered and completed first grade above the control group and were performing at grade level. As second-graders, the fall reading diagnostic test showed that, while not quite at grade level in comprehension and decoding, the children with preschool experience did better than the control group. In addition, in the area of fluency, the preschool group was performing at grade level. This information illustrates the positive impact of the Four-Year-Old At-Risk/Pre-K program on achievement scores of children who had an opportunity to participate as compared to the control group of children who did not participate in preschool prior to kindergarten.

#### **Early Childhood Special Education Services/Program:**

The early childhood special education program has been located in various settings over the years and is currently located and integrated with other early childhood programs at Kennedy Elementary. This program requires its own unique space. A wide variety of educational settings are available for children requiring early intervention services. Services and programming promote overall development through play and peer interactions. Early Childhood Special Education Services at Kennedy include free monthly developmental screenings for children ages three to five. Children qualifying for early childhood special education may receive services with one of our half-day inclusive preschool classrooms at Kennedy at no cost to the family. Half-day inclusive classrooms are designed to be a 50/50 model of inclusion. Half of the children in these classrooms enroll as Peer Models; they must be three years old by August 31, of the current school year. Peer Model students will provide positive peer interactions, demonstrate play skills and model appropriate language and behavior for children with special needs while in the classroom setting. A \$150.00 monthly Peer Model tuition fee is charged to families. To meet the needs of identified children qualifying for special education over the past few years, we have found the need to increase district-based early childhood special education classrooms. Classroom space of 4-6 half-day sessions is needed (2-3 three classrooms).

Over the past 18 years, the early childhood special education staff has developed a strong collaborative relationship with community early childhood centers. This collaboration has allowed for community-based services for children with disabilities. Individualized instruction is provided in their community learning environment (at home, preschool, child care center, play groups, etc.). Special education staff members provide the necessary consultation and direct training to staff in community settings which is critical to the success of children being served in

community settings. By appointment, services may also be provided if determined to be the best way to meet the child's need.