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Families waiting for Wright time More than 60 kids on list to get into all-day kindergarten

By Aracely Hernandez - Staff Writer

DeKALB - The DeKalb School District's only all-day kindergarten program received more than twice the number of applications it could accept for this school year.

More than 60 families are on a waiting list to get into Wright Elementary School's kindergarten program - hoping that spots might open up over the course of the year if students transfer or their families move. There are shorter waiting lists for all the other grade levels at Wright, as well. The school, which is in Malta, serves kindergartners through fifth-grade students.

Despite the popularity of the all-day kindergarten program, it is unlikely that the district will be expanding it to its eight other elementary schools.

"We'd love to have it at every school, but we don't have the space," Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Linell Lasswell said. "Right now, we can't. All of our buildings are full to the max. Educationally, it would be the best way to go."

She said funding for an all-day program shouldn't be a problem. She said expanding the program would essentially pay for itself because the number of bus trips for kindergartners would be nearly cut in half and because it would come with an increase in state funding.

Under state funding rules, a student in half-day kindergarten is considered half a student, and thus is funded at half the rate an all-day student is.

Wright Elementary School - which first opened for the 2004-05 school year - partners with Northern Illinois University to provide programming at the school. It is one of the first of its kind in the area, officials have said. The goal of the partnership is to learn what the best teaching methods are and eventually share them throughout the district and the state.

Dawn Marx's son Jacob was in the school's all-day kindergarten and her daughter Jessica was in fourth grade there this past school year. The mother said she couldn't be happier.

"My children have had the best experience," she said. "Both children were very upset when the school year was ending."

She said she liked the idea of kindergartners having more time to focus on activities and subjects.

Annette Meares' son, Mitchel, also was in the kindergarten program. Her daughter Malerie also attended Wright this past school year, in the fourth grade.

Annette Meares said she knew her son was ready for all-day kindergarten - she was the one who was more skeptical about the idea. But she knows she made the best decision.

"I know that being all-day, it gave him all that much opportunity to double the time to get a better education and to reinforce learning," Meares said. "I know he came out ahead because of all-day kindergarten."

She said she doesn't like it when people criticize the idea of all-day kindergarten.

"I cringe to think of it as being looked at as a day care issue," she said. "I looked at it as an educational benefit."

Registration for the partnership school is over. Local families were notified in February about the early registration program at the school.

"We did turn away some people," Lasswell said. "The response has been very popular."

The school's enrollment is 275 students. There were spots open for 46 kindergartners.

Lasswell said priority was given to kindergarten students with siblings at Wright in the upper grades.

Registration for the district's 11 other schools begins next week. Parents should have already received registration forms in the mail. Registration for returning students runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. July 18-21 at the Education Center, 901 S. Fourth St. General registration for returning students and for students new to the district is Aug. 11, 12 and 15.

More information is available at the district Web site, www.dist428.k12.il.us.

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