

BHS approves switch to full-day kindergarten

Part-day option will be available, but parents must transport students to Fox Hills

BY CHRIS JACKETT

cjackett@candgnews.com

BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP — Entering kindergarten is an exciting time in a child's life, but a Bloomfield Hills Schools Board of Education decision last week will tweak how that

has operated for many years.

The board voted 6-0 Feb. 2 to approve a recommendation from district officials to switch from part-day to full-day kindergarten programs at its four elementary schools for the 2012-13 school year. District officials are saying the

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change is a welcome positive for both teachers and parents.

"Overwhelmingly positive. Over 70 percent of our current kindergarten students attend full-day now, with parents paying the tuition costs for the extended day portion," said Laurie McCarty, assistant superintendent for instructional services, via email. "This will allow for free full-day programming. Our teachers are also very happy, as they will have more time each day to meet the needs of their students."

Several factors went into the decision. Under new changes at the state level, the district would no longer receive full-time equivalents toward funding for the part-time kindergarten students. This would reduce a \$3.4 million portion of the state aid the district receives to \$1.7 million.

Implementing the full-day program does come at a cost to the district, but it only costs BHS about \$914,400 instead of the \$1.7 million loss.

The district will have to hire eight full-time teachers and four paraeducators, and take into account

increased staffing needs for "specials" classes, which include art, physical education, Spanish and music. The district also loses about \$118,000 in extended-day kindergarten tuition and will have to spend approximately \$32,000 more on teacher supplies and classroom setup.

"It is more costly to lose the revenue than to lose the full-day program," McCarty told the board during a Jan. 19 presentation. "Instructionally, it's the right thing to do for our younger students."

McCarty cited research suggesting full-day kindergarten increases "school readiness, benefits children socially and emotionally, supports literacy and language development, improves student attendance and leads to higher academic achievement."

Currently, the two half-day options last from 9:05 a.m.-12:10 p.m. and 12:45-3:55 p.m., but more than two-thirds of parents pay to have their children stay at school for the full day. The free full-day class will last from 9:05 a.m.-3:55 p.m. starting in the fall. Target class sizes will remain 18-22 students.

"Our half-day kindergarten teachers right now report there is never enough time to do what they need to do in three hours," McCarty

said. "They really do want more time. One of our kindergarten teachers wrote to me and said, 'Laurie, kindergarten is the new first grade.' And when you look at the

expectations, I cannot say that she is wrong. It really feels that way."

Eastover Elementary School Principal Letitia Tappin said her school is excited about the changes.

"The majority of the parents are pleased, since most kindergarteners already attend school for a full day," Tappin said via email. "Teachers are

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excited to have more time to work with students. Our kindergartners will have extended developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that allow for deeper understanding and critical thinking. All-day kindergarten will make for an easier transition to a full (day) in first grade."

For those parents who feel their child isn't ready to immediately jump into a full-day program, there will be a part-day option offered at Fox Hills — which currently houses the Bloomin' Tots preschool program — as long as there is a minimum of 15 kindergarteners and the parents provide transportation for their children. McCarty said the existence of

the part-day option is dependant on parent interest.

"Most school districts have found that, after the first year, half-day enrollment drops off. We will re-evaluate at the end of next year," McCarty said via email. "Not yet determined if it will be morning or afternoon, but either the same a.m. or p.m. times as this year."

McCarty planned to meet with kindergarten teachers to go over the new format and additional professional development needs leading up to next school year. With many of the other districts in the county also making the switch, if they haven't already, McCarty said, Oakland Intermediate School District is offering professional development.

Call Staff Writer Chris Jackett at (586) 279-1110.