

With low enrollment, Cedar Grove-Belgium school officials pondering future of 5K program

Because only a small number of parents have requested a half-day 5-year-old kindergarten program next year, a separate class may not be offered at Cedar Grove-Belgium Elementary School.

The School Board is waiting for more information on projected enrollment before making a decision on the half-day program.

Principal Craig Gunderson told the board on Feb. 13 that seven or eight children had registered for the half-day program. The board policy requires a minimum of 12 students to offer the class.

Next year's 5K class is expected to have 52 students compared to this year's class of 82 students. The 4-year-old program, which is half-days four days a week, is projected to have 60 students in 2013-14.

Letters have been sent to parents in preschool and child-care programs and notices placed in newspapers, Gunderson said. This may attract more students, some of whom may enroll in a half-day program.

If a half-day 5K program is not offered, Gunderson said, he would like to retain teacher Jennifer Weinhold to provide extra help to first-graders who need it.

"Of the 82 students anticipated for first grade, 11 students have special education needs ranging from speech and language to significant developmental delays and suspected mental-health issues," Gunderson said. "This is a large and needy group of kids.

"It would be good for them to have a familiar face

If a separate half-day class is not offered, Gunderson said, the 5K program will have academic classes in the morning and enrichment classes, such as music, art and physical education, in the afternoon.

"Parents can always take their children out early, but they miss the afternoon sessions," he said.

Currently, the half-day morning program, which has 16 students, includes shortened enrichment classes.

Gunderson said he values the half-day program and, if it is discontinued next year, it could be offered the following year if there is sufficient interest.

Half-day kindergarten in doubt

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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Taking her child home early is not a good option, said Jamie Brill, who has sons in 4K and 5K half-day classes this year.

“It is simply not the same as a class worked around a half-day schedule. I like the 5K program we have now,” Brill said.

“I love the smaller step that the half-day 5K class offers. It allows my child to achieve the academic and social requirements he needs during school, and still allows him the down time he craves as a 5-year-old at his home.”

Several other parents said their children are not ready for a full-day program next year, while others said they enjoy having the afternoon with their child.

One mother said she would probably keep her child home rather than enroll him in the half-day 4K program next year if he would have to go to a full-time program the following year. That would give him an extra year to mature, she said.

Board member Gina Sotelo urged the parent to talk to the kindergarten teachers before making a decision.

“I would hate to have your child miss out on a year of schooling,” she said. “I know how you feel. My youngest wasn’t ready for a full-day kindergarten.”

Board President Jim Lautenschlaeger said his children went to the half-day program when he was a stay-at-home dad.

“As a parent who has kids who went to half-day 5K, I totally support that,” he said.

“But you get funded on kids in the seats, and we felt 12 was the minimum needed to offer the option. I like the option as a parent. This is going to be a hard decision for us.”

Board member Dan Bruhn said his children also went to the half-day program.

“It’s a great option, but with the funding the way it is, it’s something we have to look at,” Bruhn said.

Matthew Wollner, the father of a 4K student, said it appears the decision is being made because of money.

“It scares me that it’s the money. It seems that isn’t the way we operate in this school district,” he said. “It’s always been what’s best for the kids. Some kids adapt better to having that extra year to prepare for all-day school.”

Gunderson said some of the parents who chose the half-day program are passionate about it.

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“There are people just as passionate about the all-day program,” he said.