

School district to offer satellite 4K program

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Committee of day-care providers approach officials with plan to provide parents one-stop convenience

The Northern Ozaukee School Board agreed to offer a pilot program, providing 4-year-old kindergarten classes at private day-care providers throughout southeastern Wisconsin through the state's open enrollment process next year.

The concept was proposed by a committee from the Wisconsin Child Care Administrators and the Milwaukee Child Care Alliance as a way to offer kindergarten programming in a day-care setting.

Five regional programs will be targeted for the 2010-11 school year — Stepping Stones Children's Center in Belgium and Port Washington, as well as Children's Learning Center, Ebenezer Child Care Centers, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Children's Center and Mary Linsmeier Schools.

David Linsmeier, executive director of MLS Children's Edu-Care which operates 15 child-care centers in the metropolitan area, headed the committee of day-care providers that approached the district with the proposal.

Linsmeier cited the district's decision to offer a 4K program through its on-line school, Wisconsin Virtual Learning, as the reason it was selected for the program.

"We have been trying to form relationships with a school district for a program like this. What drew us to Northern Ozaukee is the district's willingness to think outside the box," he told the board.

Linsmeier said his company has individual contracts with five school districts, but the Northern Ozaukee proposal takes the plan to a broader scale.

"Eventually, there is the potential of creating hundreds of classrooms put into place to serve thousands of students," he said.

"The partnership provides an opportunity for the district to expand its educational outreach programs to the extended community across the state," according to Northern Ozaukee Supt. Bill Harbron.

The private-public partnership is appealing to day-care providers because parents will be able to drop their children off at a single location for kindergarten classes

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and child care.

The plan is a variation on one used by the Port Washington-Saukville School District, where 4-year-old kindergarten is offered at child-care sites within the district using the centers' staff.

In the Northern Ozaukee plan, participating day-care centers will also use licensed teachers, but the sites will be scattered across the area and youngsters will be enrolled in the Fredonia district.

To be included in the satellite 4K program, children who do not live in the district will have to apply through the open enrollment process, which runs through Friday, Feb. 19.

Students can only be enrolled in the program if their home district offers 4-year-old kindergarten.

Funding for the program will come from state aids, with about 80% being retained by the providers for staffing, materials and supplies. The school district will keep 20% of the state funds for oversight and coordination.

Northern Ozaukee said there would be no direct cost to the school district.

Under the terms of the agreement with the district, the day-care providers cannot assess an additional charge to parents for the 4K program.

Because of the short notice, Harbron said, "We are not anticipating a tremendous number of students during this initial year."

In the long-term, however, he said the program would help the district's goal of diversifying its revenue sources.

According to preliminary calculations, the district could receive approximately \$50,000 in additional state revenue if 100 children take part in the satellite 4K program.

In accordance with state Department of Public Instruction standards, the 4K classes would run 2-1/2 hours a day for 437 classroom hours a year. Sessions will be offered in

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the morning and afternoon.

The Ozaukee Elementary School staff will be responsible for overseeing the kindergarten program, but Principal Cindy Dallman said the initial workload should be manageable.

“What you are looking at is dealing with the cream of the crop in providers, so I don’t anticipate problems. If we had to take every provider who applied, I would be more concerned,” Dallman said.

After a lengthy presentation and assurances that the proposed contracts had been reviewed by the district’s attorney, the board approved the satellite program with a review following the first year.