

School district to reconsider 4-K plan

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

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Grafton officials will study ways to establish program during review of 2009 report by Elementary Schools Task Force

Four years after exploring ways to establish a kindergarten program for 4-year-old children but tabling the plan, Grafton School District officials are revisiting the idea.

Supt. Mel Lightner told the School Board on Monday that 4-K options will be considered during a review of a 2009 report by the Elementary Schools Task Force.

Lightner said he will work with other district officials to evaluate the report, which studied more cost-effective ways to run elementary schools, including restructuring how classrooms and buildings are used.

“We have a host of issues to deal with,” Lightner told the board.

A number of factors, including financial concerns and an ongoing mission of improving education, sparked the review, which Lightner said could result in changes by the start of the 2014-15 school year.

Among possible changes, he said, is the creation of campus elementary schools for more efficient use of classroom space.

“For example, there are six kindergarten classes now, but if we had them all in the one school, could we have just five?” Lightner asked.

Designating schools for specific uses, such as early-childhood, intermediate and advanced classes, is another option, he added.

“There are pros and cons,” Lightner said. “But we need to take a look at options, especially in light of limited funding.”

More than 360 of Wisconsin’s 424 school districts currently offer 4-K programs, including Port Washington-Saukville, Northern Ozaukee and Cedar Grove-Belgium.

Grafton considered establishing a program several years ago in response to a survey indicating that more than 80% of district parents of 4-year-olds supported the plan. In its report, the task force recommended constructing new classrooms and renovating all three elementary school buildings to better accommodate student needs, enhance security and provide space for a 4-K program if desired in the future.

Lightner said the time is right to reconsider 4-K classes, especially if they improve the quality of education in the district.

“Eighty to 85% of Wisconsin school districts have these programs. We may be more attractive

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as a district if we offer 4-year-old kindergarten,” Lightner said.

“We’re at a competitive disadvantage because of not having it.”

School officials noted that most students who enroll in the district’s kindergarten program have attended 4-K classes elsewhere.

The Elementary Schools Task Force, which included administrators, teachers, other staff members and parents, spent nearly eight months studying space and programming needs at Kennedy, Woodview and Grafton elementary schools.

Lightner said he and Grafton Elementary School Principal Jeff Martyka will spearhead the review and work with other district personnel.

Plans call for a preliminary report to be completed by November. The board is expected to solicit community input before deciding a 4-K program or making other changes.

Lightner said any changes should be made by February if they are to be implemented for the 2014-15 school year.