

Early Childhood Advisory Committee
November 10, 2014

In Attendance: Beth Cosme, Therese Lahart, Kathy Casey, Sally Gaw, Donna Pfeifer, LIsa Freimuth, Michelle Richards, Karen Lorch, Lori Pierce, Jen Holmstrom, Jean Armon, Cathy Leslie, Cindy Drabeck, Mary Lynn Duffy

Background Information - Unsure where future funding will come from for the preschool both within the district and from the state. Preschool is not mandated. Had Preschool for All grant previously, but this is the 3rd year without it. Our district lost grant funding due to insufficient levels of poverty and racial diversity. Since that funding was eliminated, which provided tuition free enrollment for students at risk and in the moderate to low income ranges, our enrollment has dropped by 25-30 students. This is an indication that we are underserving the community. Students whose parents are unable to afford the tuition are unable to attend. Additionally, income is generated from tuition, but it doesn't cover the entire cost of the program. Sustaining the preschool program is a concern as the district faces increasing financial difficulties.

Preschool is not mandated, but Early Childhood programming for children with special needs is required. Our blended program provides the least restrictive environment for these students. Therese Lahart expressed the importance of the preschool program. Cathy Leslie noted that Starnet views our program as a model for other programs. Typical students are models for children with special needs. The reverse is also true. It was also noted that early interventions save money in the long run.

Senate Bill 16 - Dr. Casey reported that if senate bill 16 passes, the district will use a lot of money and cuts may have to be made. She has been told that if passed, the program will be phased in. If pension liability is added, it would be catastrophic for the district. Community may be asked for a referendum to support the schools if the bill is passed. The last referendum was in 1974. Sustainability is the crucial factor. Dr. Casey reported that the Board has always supported the preschool program and it would not be on the chopping block first.

Dr. Casey sent letters to families to send to representatives to write against SB 16. She reported that is probably won't get passed in Lame Duck session. Some area districts will be getting much more money. Right now there is no oversight or accountability as to how districts getting increased funds will use them. The funding formula has always favored Chicago and downstate.

Tuition Study - Dr. Casey to do cost assessment. Cindy will calculate tuition income based on current enrollment.

Community Partnerships - Recently developed relationship with Kiwanis. They are providing tuition support for a needy family with a \$500 donation to the program. Need to develop more partnerships. Recommendations to contact: local doctors, realtors (flyer in welcome package), local insurance companies, local small businesses, large businesses, Jewel, and the Palos baseball organization, AYSO.

There may be some grants we could write for, but Dr. Casey reported that she has written many grants and then get denied because we do not have enough ELL or low income students. They are very time consuming to write. Each year our grant funds are decreasing. Lori Pierce volunteered to research and possibly write for some grants.

Fundraising to support program costs - Preschool stopped fund raising as a school because PFA took it over. Would like to bring back some fund raising. Some groups have continued to fundraise such as the band continue to fundraise as PFA cannot cover all program costs. Fundraising may be used to support free or reduced tuition to those that cannot afford the tuition.

Pancake Breakfast - In coordination with Kiwanis, there will be a Pancake breakfast fundraising event on Saturday February 21st. Most proceeds will benefit the preschool.

Community Needs - Are we meeting the needs of the community effectively? Is full day needed? Are some children going elsewhere because they need full day programming? Full day program would most likely increase enrollment. Some can't send because of the cost of tuition. How can we serve them? Some children from area apartments may not be getting served. Possibly conduct a survey.

Advertising - How is the program advertised since we compete with so many other programs in the area and some people still don't know about the program? Cathy Leslie reported that information about the program is included in district wide newsletter that goes to every house. It is also advertised on channel 4. We also advertise in St. Al's flyer and through signage around the neighborhood. It was recommended that we promote how our program and staff is at a higher level than other area programs. We can also attend the Community Expo, but Kiwanis didn't get any new members after attending. Cathy Leslie to calculate how many kindergarteners did not come through the preschool.

It was noted that we are more expensive than most area programs all except Montessori. Some people can't afford the cost, and many programs are now offering full-day. It was recommended that we open the program up to non-residents, but this may create other problems. Cathy Leslie said, they may be required to pass a screening to qualify. Moms of Palos often all talk about preschool and full day Kindergarten.

Future Goals -

Develop community partnerships

Increase Fundraising

Secure Grants - Lori Pierce to research

Raise program awareness

Increase program attendance

Provide reduced tuition to needy families

Continue Community breakfast to raise awareness.

Compare our program to other programs - Mrs. Richards will research this

Next meeting: 12/8 - for next meeting. - 9:30 a.m.