

FACT SHEET

U-46 Leaders Bring Full-Day Kindergarten Vision to Life in 2016-17

August 2016, U-46 Department of School & Community Relations

When school doors open August 17, our youngest learners will walk into full-day kindergarten classrooms throughout our 40 neighborhood schools and begin their educational journey toward graduation day at the Sears Centre Arena in 2029. School District U-46 leaders will welcome our Class of 2029 with fully-stocked classrooms, ambitious play-based lesson plans and dedicated teachers who work together to meet each child's needs.

Some 2,600 strong, these five- and six-year-olds will be the first group to participate in District-wide full-day kindergarten (FDK) programming, which was made possible through Board-approved boundary changes in December 2015 and the vision and commitment of District leaders and teachers. The District had previously offered FDK to students who needed intensive preparation for first grade and to those whose parents saw the benefit of additional class time. Now all U-46 kindergarteners are eligible to benefit from FDK.

District leaders have long wanted to offer FDK, aware of the convincing body of research that the extra classroom time can pay dividends in academic and social achievement for

Teachers and parents see the benefits of Full-Day Kindergarten

"Brain research shows this is the most critical time for children to explore and learn new things. The more time they have to learn, the better served they will be."

Peggy Ondera, U-46 Director of Early Learner Initiatives

"With the full day, we have the time to really target the students' needs. Without the extra time, we wouldn't be able to give them the solid base they need and will transfer to another language."

Zahidee Marcano, FDK bilingual teacher at Illinois Park School

"The kids are always moving and doing. You're just able to go further than you would in two and a half hours, so I think all kids would benefit."

Karen Smith, teacher in the full-day intervention program at Illinois Park

"Honestly, half-day kindergarten is just not enough time. In full day there's just so much more opportunity for one-on-one time with the teacher. I think it's the best thing we can do for our kids."

Amy Bosque, U-46 parent of Victor Bosque, current full-day kindergarten student

"She has grown by leaps and bounds. She's excited about school; she's enthusiastic about the things she's learned. As a parent, that's priceless."

Amy Olcott, mother of Illinois Park FDK student Ashley Lauren Olcott

children as well as the nationwide shift from half-day to full-day kindergarten.

The additional classroom time promises significant academic, social and emotional benefits for all our new learners – advantages that should be apparent as the Class of '29 progresses through each grade level in U-46.

Although adults may recall their kindergarten days as a carefree introduction to school, they may not realize the valuable lessons they acquired. Certainly, kindergartners do learn important building blocks of academic knowledge. According to District leaders, the biggest lesson is imparting a love of learning and an enthusiasm for school that can become a kindergartener's guiding light.

The additional classroom time in FDK – six hours, compared to the two-and-a-half hour, half-day program – affords U-46 teachers the time and greater flexibility to work with children individually, assessing their skills and providing one-on-one attention. Children come to kindergarten from a variety of backgrounds. Some may have been in preschool, but for others, kindergarten represents their first experience in a group or classroom setting. Teachers can use the extra hours to help these children, especially those from low-income or non-English speaking homes, to achieve skills that will provide the foundation for educational success.

The District has adopted a play-based curriculum for kindergartners. Research shows kindergarten-aged kids experience tremendous development, both mentally and socially. The play-based curriculum is designed to meet the young learners at their level – a critical juncture of growth and brain development -- and foster their growth through hands-on, interactive classroom experiences.

U-46 has spent many months preparing the launch of FDK via a special committee created to oversee the project and create a curriculum and framework for successful implementation. This summer, the kindergarten teachers completed an intensive eight-day training session. They mastered the new curriculum and gained insights into the social and emotional development of children. The instructors can begin creating the community of learners on day one.

The District's elementary school principals also participated in the training to know how to recognize effective teaching in the new curriculum and provide feedback to instructors to ensure that all students are reaping the benefits of full-day kindergarten.

Children who will march into kindergarten this fall will, 13 years from now, be marching across stages in their caps and gowns to accept the high school diplomas. U-46 leaders believe full-day kindergarten is an important stepping stone to help the members of the Class of '29 build a firm foundation for educational success.

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