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FACT SHEET

U-46 FDK Teachers Practice Collaborative Approach for best outcomes

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

To many, teaching might appear to be a solitary profession. Day in and day out, people might imagine that it's just the teacher, all alone each day with a roomful of their students. Then, after school, it's more solo hours spent grading assignments and preparing future lessons.

It is certainly true that teachers in District U-46, as educators do everywhere, must meet some individual responsibilities. What's less understood, perhaps, is how U-46 teachers band together to produce great education. This collaborative approach has been a trademark for the kindergarten teachers and critically important in the District's new Full-Day Kindergarten classrooms.

The U-46 kindergarten teachers' roles in the conception, implementation and ongoing execution of a new curriculum represents the best aspects of concerted brainstorming and idea exchanging, a group effort that pays

Teachers and administrators celebrate collaborative teaching in Full-Day Kindergarten

"We worked alongside our principals this summer in professional development sessions that helped us hone our philosophy and approach to the play-based curriculum. That collaborative work made all the difference. We are all on the same page as we move forward with kindergarten in U-46 and hopefully that collaboration will translate into a warm, welcome environment for families and students."

Karen Smith , Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) teacher leader for U-46.

"About 20 teachers participated in creating the new kindergarten curriculum. We traded documents back and forth so we could all see what everyone was doing and add comments. It was a really good mix and it has given teachers a lot of great resources."

Kim Deering, FDK teacher at Prairieview Elementary in Bartlett.

"The vision of coaching is modeling a successful classroom – this is what it looks like and why."

Apryl Lowe, Principal at Illinois Park Center for Early Learning in Elgin.

"The assessment office would ask us at the end of the year why we had been so successful in raising achievement levels. The answer is because we worked so well together sharing ideas to help struggling students."

Colleen Pecucci, FDK teacher at Oakhill Elementary in Streamwood.

dividends for the District's new 2,500 full-day kindergartners.

Essentially, collaborative teaching is built on the simple idea of working together -- that many hands make for less work. The most critical element is the exchange of ideas among all teachers and between experienced teachers and their newer colleagues, and the in-concert efforts of general kindergarten teachers with specialized instructors in areas like dual language and special education.

Research backs up what U-46 teachers have learned through experience. When two or more teachers share ideas and responsibilities, it is more likely they will enjoy a more active, creative classroom of young learners. Such active classrooms help students develop a love of learning that can underpin success in school and life.

This collaborative effort was on full display in the months of preparation the District spent getting ready for Full-Day Kindergarten. To make sure that the full six hour school day is well spent, a group of 20 educators worked together to develop a thoughtful, play-based curriculum for Full-Day Kindergarten.

Educators and administrators broke into teams to generate curriculum in math, literacy and science, creating and swapping documents among team members. They also included members of the other teams so everyone could see each other's work and offer helpful ideas. One team member said the planning process provided a great opportunity to dig into research and revisit the best ways to integrate the academic content with the social development that provides the critical foundation for kindergartners.

Fortunately, the District has plenty of in-house expertise on collaborative teaching. Teachers have been working together across U-46 for years to ensure that academic content is taught effectively and instructional guidelines are being met. This collegial, interdisciplinary approach has proven a great success at Illinois Park, where U-46 has offered Full-Day Kindergarten for students in the bilingual and at-risk programs, and for students whose parents wanted their children to have the benefit of additional instruction.

At Illinois Park Early Learning Center in Elgin, experienced teachers have been able to show newer teachers the kindergarten ropes – how to best set up the classroom to engage young learners. Sharing work among teachers frees up planning time and results in a more engaging content and classroom atmosphere that can focus on the needs of young minds and ensures that teachers can provide more individualized instruction.

The work at Illinois Park has helped kindergartners across the District. Colleen Pecucci teaches kindergarten at Oakhill Elementary in Streamwood. She teaches English-speaking students but many of her learners come from Spanish-speaking homes. Her work with Dual Language instructors at Illinois Park, Pecucci said, helped her understand how in Spanish, reading is taught with a heavy emphasis on phonetics. That knowledge,

she said, helps her more effectively teach reading, as well as communicate and coordinate school lessons with parents.

Kindergarten teachers and first grade teachers frequently interact, too, to make sure students are making a smooth transition.

Implementing the new Full-Day Kindergarten program involved eight days of staff development, which included principals, to make sure that all teachers would learn how to effectively implement the new curriculum. District teachers who have experience with the play-based curriculum have offered their colleagues the chance to visit their classrooms to see the different stations that are a key component of the active, hands-on learning.

The District has created a framework to ensure that effective collaboration will continue throughout the school year. A coaching program will send teachers into the classroom as an extra set of eyes to make sure their colleagues are applying the curriculum for the maximum benefit of students. Once a month, the teachers will meet after school in the "Kindergarten Café," a program designed to update, get feedback and provide a forum for teachers to exchange ideas to best help students.

Thanks to the efforts of a dedicated team, the District's early learners won't have to go it alone.

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