

All-day kindergarten examined

Local districts are considering state option for 2015-16 year

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Monmouth Elementary School kindergarten teacher Samantha Henderson has the names and photos of her smiling students posted on a two-sided board in her classroom. One side is her morning class roster; on the other, her afternoon class.

Henderson, like many other kindergarten teachers, leads two half-day sessions, each about 2½ hours long.

That may change next year in Polk County school districts — and others across the state — as schools prepare to offer full-day kindergarten. Following the passage of House Bill 248 in 2011, starting in 2015-16, the state is required to pay for full-day kindergarten in those districts who choose to offer it.

With that in mind, local school districts appear to be moving toward offering full-day kindergarten.

Falls City and Perrydale have already made their decisions, choosing to make the move come fall.

Central School District is gearing up for full-day kindergarten next year, but is keeping a close watch on funding, said Superintendent Buzz Brazeau.

Dallas School District's Board will begin discussions in February.

For Falls City, the decision was easy. Through its FACES after-school program, the district offers kindergartners a half-day supplemental program after traditional class is over, said Falls City Superintendent Jack Thompson.

"The kids are already in school all day, every day," Thompson said.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Monmouth Elementary School teacher Samantha Henderson works with students in her morning kindergarten class.

The supplemental session focuses on classroom behavior, developing social skills and enrichment activities.

The kindergarten classroom assistant oversees the program, so is already working full time. That means the only major cost is moving the part-time teacher to full time, Thompson said.

Perrydale School District followed suit, making a decision to offer full-day kindergarten earlier this year.

For Dallas and Central, implementing full-day kindergarten will require more staffing and classroom space.

Dallas Interim Superintendent Dennis Engle said the move would mean providing space, teachers and teaching assistants for two more classrooms at both Lyle and Oakdale Heights elementary schools.

"We are working to make sure we have the ability to

offer full-day kindergarten," Engle said.

At Central School District, preparation is already well under way, Brazeau said.

Cost estimates for expanding to full day won't be final until the district begins working on developing its 2015-16 budget, but he said the first year will come with one-time expenses for new classrooms.

"Everybody is excited as well as apprehensive," he said. "It will be a strain on the buildings and a strain on staff."

To ease that burden, school officials have been visiting other schools with full-day kindergarten to see how those districts are running their programs.

"We are looking at it in every way possible to do the best job for the kids to set the stage for them to go to school," Brazeau said.

School officials believe the

effort is worth the potential benefit to students.

"We think it's good for our kids," said Brazeau. "There is a marked difference in how well the kids are prepared entering first grade."

Engle said the studies district officials have reviewed point to full-day kindergarten providing a stronger foundation for achieving crucial benchmarks, such as grade-level reading by third grade, a key indicator of future academic success.

Henderson said having a full day to work with students will make it easier to cover the increasing amount of state learning standards for kindergartners.

She said kindergarten is becoming "the new first grade" and it's difficult to "balance the discovery of kindergarten with the rigor of first grade" in a half day.

"I feel like I'm trying to squeeze things in," Hender-

son said.

She does have logistical concerns, though, such as creating a full-day schedule and finding the room needed to offer full-day classes.

Answering those questions will in part come down to funding for school districts. Gov. John Kitzhaber included \$220 million in his 2015-17 budget recommendation for full-day kindergarten.

Engle said the amount should be adequate, as long as it is in addition to — and not taken from — funding already designated for education. Kitzhaber's budget is simply a proposal. It's in the hands of the state legislature to pound out a final figure.

Brazeau said he hopes the legislature will designate more funding than Kitzhaber did.

"If the budget is not there, we will relook at it," Brazeau said.

SCHOOL NOTES

Budget committee members needed

MONMOUTH/INDEPENDENCE — The Central School District is seeking candidates to fill two positions on its budget committee.

The positions are for Zones 1 and 7. Candidates should reside within one of these zones. However, if the district's board of directors does not receive qualified candidates from within the zone, an out-of-zone appointment may be made.

Zone 1 — Includes Independence north of Monmouth Street, with a term from Feb. 2 to June 30, 2017.

Zone 7 — Includes areas outside the city limits of Monmouth and Independence, including the portion of the school district in Marion and Benton counties and south of the Monmouth-Falls City state highway, with a term from Feb. 2 to June 30, 2017.

Applicants must submit a letter of interest by Jan. 23 at 4:30 p.m. to the Central School Board, Central School District 13J, 750 S. Fifth St., Independence, OR 97351. Appointments will be made Feb. 2.

For more information: 503-838-0030, ext. 2251.

Dental van coming to Perrydale School

PERRYDALE — Perrydale School will hold a free dental screening for students and the public on Thursday.

Local dentists will donate their time to offer free general dental screenings and basic services. Also available during the event will be resources for health, vision and dental insurance, senior services and child care.

Screenings will be open to the public from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the school, 7445 Perrydale Road. All ages are welcome. The event is sponsored by Perrydale School District and Perrydale Service Integration Team.

For more information: Perrydale School, 503-623-2040.



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