

Public Education Study Committee: Pre Kindergarten

Visit to Josiah Bartlett Public Pre Kindergarten Program October 23, 2018

Jane van B posted 1/10/19

Four League members (Dorene Lengyel, Carol Kinzler, Libby Vesilind and Jane VanBremen) travelled to the Josiah Bartlett Elementary School in Bartlett, NH to visit their public Pre Kindergarten program which began this fall. We met with Pam Stimpson, the director of Special Services for SAU9 and Joe Yahna, the principal of Bartlett Elementary School. They were extremely generous with their time and answered all of our questions. We observed the children playing outside, met the lead teacher and the art teacher, and saw the classroom space.

Pam provided us with the document SAU 9 SSIP Leadership Team Early Education Summary of Feasibility Investigation and Work to Date which explains the process by which the Bartlett PreK came to be. This report will address some of the highlights of this document.

Overview

The Bartlett PreK has 31 three- and four- year-old children enrolled. They had expected an enrollment of only 18 children. Principal Joe Yahna estimated that five of these children would not be getting any preschool experience and four might be in some sort of daycare if they were not enrolled at Bartlett. He also explained that several families could have moved to the area specifically so their children could attend Bartlett.

The public PreK is co-located within the K-8 elementary school, in the same space that was formerly occupied by a private preschool that rented the space for a nominal fee. When the private preschool closed they gave all of their equipment to the school. The outside preschool equipment, located in a separate area from the outside space for the K-8th grade students, did not meet insurance requirements. The school would like to get a grant to build an appropriate playground for the PreK students.

Bartlett Pre-K has the same hours of operation as the rest of the school: 8:30 am-3:15 pm. There is a fully qualified teacher who is paid on the same scale as every other teacher. The classroom is also staffed by a full-time classroom assistant. Three students have 1-1 paraprofessionals assigned to them. There is a special ed teacher, occupational therapist and speech therapist who work with students in the classroom. Students can be enrolled as many days per week as parents desire. No transportation is provided for the Pre-K students. Prior to the opening of the PreK, preschoolers needing special education services attended a variety of private placements; now they all come to Bartlett.

The PreK uses The Creative Curriculum. Special Education students receive pre and post assessments in all areas of development, which are used to develop goals and teaching strategies. Ideally, the team would like to be able to do this for all of the students. The Pre-K teacher works to align her program with the Kindergarten curriculum. Pre-K students receive services from all of the specialists at the school including art and PE. Initially, the specialists were unsure how this would work, but when we met with the art teacher she enthusiastically told us how much she is enjoying working with the preschoolers and showed us some of their art.

Bartlett has a newly engaged PTO and principal Joe Yahna has plans to encourage them to sponsor activities to include all families and children. However, because the Pre-K has just gotten started they have not initiated any specific family engagement program this year.

History

The public Pre-K at Bartlett Elementary School has a long and complicated history beginning about five years ago. It is a result of "Raising Mt. Washington Valley," an early childhood engagement project initiated by School Administrative Unit SAU9 and Carroll County Coalition for Public Health (C3PH). The project aimed to determine what quality educational programming would best serve the needs of preschool age children and their families in the SAU9 school districts (Albany, Eaton, Chatham, Jackson, Bartlett, Conway and Hart's Location). The engagement process occurred in conjunction with SAU 9 State Systematic Improvement Plan (SSIP). "Raising Mt. Washington Valley" was supported by the NH Endowment for Health, NH Charitable Foundation and NH Listens. The engagement process involved over 140 people in focus groups, two "Raising NH" screenings and community conversations and an Action Forum. Three goals were identified by the Action Forum: increase awareness of early childhood development, increase access to quality early childhood programs, and develop a Family Resource Program to help families enhance their children's development birth to age five.

As a result of the engagement process and community goal setting, the Bartlett School Board placed a warrant article on the ballot for public Early Childhood Education (ECE) in March 2018. The warrant for \$149,000 passed by a 74% majority. This warrant increased local taxes by \$.14 per \$1,000. The Bartlett school budget for 2019-2020 will have to address the continuing funding of the ECE program at Bartlett and whether or not to impose an enrollment cap, considering that enrollment has exceeded the initial projections. It should be noted that there have been some savings due to the special education preschool students now all receiving their services in the public school rather than at a variety of private preschools.

A warrant article for a similar program in Jackson failed on a tie vote in March 2018. The Jackson School Board has made the commitment to have ECE warrant article on the ballot in Spring 2019. The Conway district has a proposal on the table to house a Pre-K in each elementary school, but these classrooms will serve special education preschoolers, with typically developing children tuitioned in.

Summary

The Bartlett ES public PreK program for all three- and four- year-old children in the school district started this fall with an enrollment of 31 children, including those that receive special education services. Children may attend this full day program for up to five days per week. The children have access to all school specialists who have adapted well to serving preschool children in an elementary school setting. This program was established through a warrant article passed by a 74% majority after an almost five year process of community education and involvement. It has been led by the extraordinary devotion of a coalition of committed citizens, school board members and early childhood proponents including Pam Stimpson, the director of Special Services and the school principal, Joe Yahna, who are committed to providing all of Bartlett's children with a high quality early childhood experience.