

Dunlap makes room for all-day kindergarten

Construction of Hickory Grove facility gives School Board the means to go forward

DUNLAP —

When the Dunlap School District opens its newest elementary school in August 2012, it also will welcome the district's first class of full-day kindergarten students.

"Until now we did not have the physical room to double the space required for kindergarten," said Jay Marino, superintendent of Dunlap schools. "With the construction of Hickory Grove (elementary school), we were able to seriously address the issue of full-day kindergarten."

At its meeting Wednesday night, the School Board unanimously approved full-day kindergarten beginning at the start of the 2012 school year.

Marino said the district will need to hire about eight new full-time kindergarten teachers. However, adding full-time kindergarten students to its average daily attendance figures will increase the amount of state aid the district will receive. Also, the district will save about \$75,000 in transportation costs by eliminating a second daily bus run for morning and afternoon kindergarten classes. The costs don't offset, Marino said, but the expanded kindergarten program could cost the district less than \$40,000 a year.

"The board was surprised that it could be done at that cost," Marino said.

Janelle Niemeier, a kindergarten teacher at Ridgeview Elementary School for the past 10 years, helped build the case for full-day kindergarten in Dunlap. She presented the case to the School Board at its September meeting. She said the full day of class was necessary to meet new testing standards being implemented by the state. This year's kindergarten class will be the first class to take the new standards tests when it hits third grade.

"With the new core standards there was just no way to teach the material in such a short day," Niemeier said. "That's why it was more important than ever to bring full-day kindergarten to the district."

Niemeier said the teachers support the concept.

"All of the teachers are on board and very supportive," she said. "It's wonderful for our students and families, many that came from other districts and were frankly surprised that Dunlap didn't have full-day kindergarten."