



Early Childhood Facilities and Programming

Board of Education Meeting

September 11, 2018

Why are we Discussing Early Childhood Programming Facilities?

Our primary Early Childhood Center (ECC) facility located at Fairfield Warde High School is at maximum capacity.

This impacts the ratio of students with disabilities to nondisabled peers as well as special education teacher caseloads.

How do we Determine Capacity?

Targeted staffing ratio for preschool students with disabilities is one teacher to every 12 students, with as close to a 50/50 ratio of peers to identified students as possible

- 4 classrooms at 12 students per class in morning session and 12 students per class in afternoon session = 96 students (different groups of students)
- 1 classroom at 12 students with extended / full day programming needs
- 1 classroom (CLC) at up to 10 students

Total capacity= 118 students

Current Early Childhood Programming Facilities

Six Classrooms at Early Childhood Center at Fairfield Warde High School that service students with disabilities and nondisabled peers.

One classroom at Early Childhood Center at Stratfield Elementary School that services students with disabilities and nondisabled peers.

One classroom at Stratfield Elementary School that services students without identified disabilities

One classroom at Burr Elementary School that services students without identified disabilities

Where are we now?

- ECC classes do not have a maximum enrollment.
- Current class size average is approximately 11 students at both ECC sites as of the first day of school
- During the 2017-18 school year 41 students enrolled in the ECC program from October through June.
- This would add on average an additional 6 students to each ECC classroom

ECC student enrollment data from 2014 - 2018 as of October 1 / June 1

2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18*	2018-19* August 30
96 / 115	103 / 131	115 / 145 Teacher added at ECC	120* / 161* (9 / 24)* Teacher added to Stratfield	128* / TBD* (25 / TBD)*

- The percentage of nondisabled students in early childhood classes ranges from twenty percent to forty percent. (The targeted ratio is fifty percent)
- *Includes the number of preschool students enrolled in the Early Childhood Classroom at Stratfield Elementary School

Recent Response to Increasing ECC Enrollment

- Added an additional classroom at ECC for the 2016-17 school year
- Added an additional classroom at ECC at Stratfield School for the 2017-18 school year

Student Enrollment Drivers

Students enroll in Early Childhood programming in several ways:

- 1) Children that are identified with delays through the state Birth to Three system are referred, evaluated and if determined eligible, begin services on their third birthday.
- 2) Children ages Three- Kindergarten are directly referred and evaluated. If determined eligible, services begin within 45 school days from date of referral.

Student Enrollment Drivers continued

3) Child find activities: Monthly developmental screenings, early intervention/SRBI, consultation and other activities to identify students in need of referral and evaluation. Referrals begin the 45 school day mandated timeline for evaluation, eligibility determination, programming and placement.

4) Parents of students without disabilities apply for Preschool Education through the Instructional office. These spots for nondisabled peers are limited to space available.

5) Students move to Fairfield that have previously been found eligible for services in another district.

Early Childhood Programming

Student programs and services are individually designed based on student needs.

Early Childhood Programming represents a continuum of services:

- Consultation and Professional Development
- Parent support
- Itinerant services (speech and language, social skills, occupational therapy, physical therapy)
- Classroom programming: various instructional models

Early Childhood Programming

- Centralized Programming
 - The Early Childhood Center facility located at FWHS is intended to be a Centralized programming facility for preschool students with disabilities as well as nondisabled students.
 - Centralized programming facilities are intended to provide all early childhood programs and services within one location.

Early Childhood Programming

- Decentralized Programming
 - Decentralized early childhood facilities provide programming for preschool students with and without disabilities in more than one location.
 - *The Early Childhood Center at Stratfield Elementary School is considered a decentralized location.

Early Childhood Programming

ECC Programming

Strengths

- A highly professional staff dedicated to our students and families
- A preschool community for students and families
- A continuum of service that allows for teams to respond to student progress by adjusting programming
- Preschool specific Professional Learning Community (data teams, EIP, common planning)
- Facilities and scheduling are designed specifically for the needs of preschool students
- Flexible use of space based on needs of projected/incoming students
- Flexibility to determine student class placement
- Facility supports 11+ month programming for extended school year

Current Early Childhood Programming in FPS

- Currently we have a hybrid of Centralized and Decentralized programming
- Based on location, programs vary in terms of schedule and services provided
- Classrooms at Burr and Stratfield follow the elementary schedule and attend 5 days/week with the six day rotation
- Students at Burr and Stratfield participate in Art, Music, Physical education and other specials.
- Students at ECC at FWHS have access to collaborative teaching by Speech and Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists in the PreK classroom. They participate in PE twice a week.

ECC Programming

Current Challenges in FPS:

- Facility is at capacity
- Class sizes are too large
- Peer ratio lower than ideal
- Program now operates out of two locations
- Transition from preschool to kindergarten

Decentralized Programming

General Strengths

- Eases transition from PreK to Kindergarten
- Opportunity for increased access to resources (curriculum specialists, ELL, etc.)
- Opportunity for increased professional development for PreK and K teachers together
- Increased programming flexibility for students with disabilities as they transition to kindergarten
- Opportunities for older students to serve as role models/buddies

Decentralized Programming in FPS

Challenges:

- Providing support to parents specific to the needs of their preschool children
- Ensure appropriate allocation of staff to meet student needs in each location
- Maintaining collaboration and consistency of practice among all early childhood education staff
- Appropriate facilities including bathrooms, playgrounds and therapy spaces
- Balancing class sizes and access to opportunities for students from site to site
- Strengthen capacity of elementary staff to understand and respond to the unique social, communication, academic and physical needs of preschool students

Communication and Information Gathering thus far

- Met with early childhood staff
- Had an initial meeting with our Early Childhood consultant from Cooperative Educational Services who recommended that we visit other public school early childhood programs in Darien, Greenwich, Trumbull and Wilton
- Visited the Darien and Wilton Public Schools' early childhood programs
- Contacted parents of students enrolled in the early childhood center at Stratfield Elementary School during the 2017-18 school year

Next Steps

- Visit additional public school early childhood programs with both centralized and decentralized programming models (Milford, Greenwich, Trumbull) by the end of September 2018
- Schedule meetings with parents of students currently attending the Early Childhood Center throughout September and October 2018 to gather additional parent input
- Communication with SEPTA parents at September 26 meeting
- Follow-up meetings with BOE in October and November
- Follow-up meetings with ECC staff throughout September and October

Next Steps

- Gather additional information and present early childhood programming options to the Board of Education by November 2018
- Review early childhood schedules and services and recommended revisions to create equity and equal access across the district
- Develop a staffing formula by October to review with the Superintendent