

JCPS to expand kindergarten readiness camps

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Thanks to a \$500,000 gift made public Friday, Jefferson County Public Schools is half way toward the funding it needs to expand its kindergarten readiness summer camp program to 1,200 students this summer.

At the start of the school year, [nearly half of Kentucky kindergartners](http://story/news/education/2015/12/09/jcps-kindergarten-readiness-falling-state-says/76793698/) ([/story/news/education/2015/12/09/jcps-kindergarten-readiness-falling-state-says/76793698/](http://story/news/education/2015/12/09/jcps-kindergarten-readiness-falling-state-says/76793698/)) showed up to class without the basic skills necessary to do well in school.

"These youngsters are behind in school before they even start," JCPS Superintendent Donna Hargens said. "That's just not acceptable, and we have to change that."



JCPS Superintendent Donna Hargens interacts with students at the George Unseld Early Learning Academy on Friday morning, January 8, 2016 (Photo: By Michael Clevenger, The Courier-Journal)

During a news conference Friday, Mayor Greg Fischer and Hargens both touted the district's four-week summer camp program, which began in 2014 with 100 students, for its "remarkable" success in ensuring more young children have the skills they need when they begin kindergarten.

"One year in a child's life is a long time ... when these kids get started 30 percent ready and are now over 70 percent ready, that's phenomenal," Fischer said.

Regardless of how many days a student attended the 2015 summer camp session, the children participating scored roughly 71 percent kindergarten ready on the Brigance screener, which is commonly used to measure preparedness, at the start of the school year, Hargens said. The assessment asks students to recite the alphabet, remember a parent's phone number, identify colors and similar skills, according to a statement released by JCPS.

"That's a program that works ... (and) when a program works, you want to expand it even more," Hargens said.



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The C.E. and S. Foundation, which provided the \$500,000 donation, also previously provided funding for JCPS to expand the program from 100 students in 2014, its first year, to 300 students at three locations in summer 2015.

"Expanding these programs further lets us serve more children in need, but it also lets us continue to gather data, data that will tell us whether early childhood programs like this help keep children on track and on grade level through third grade," said C.E. and S. Foundation Executive Director Tess McNair. "What we know is being on grade level at third grade is one big indicator of your success throughout your academic career."

Expanding the program to 1,200 students will ultimately cost \$1 million, but Sam Corbett, Jefferson County Public Education Foundation executive director, called C.E. and S. Foundation's contribution "a great start."

During the conference, Fischer also called on the public sector to direct more funds toward "universal, high-quality" pre-kindergarten education.

"Challenge your public representatives ... to say, 'Let's invest more in our kids,'" he said. "... There's enough money in the whole system, but it's not allocating it as smartly as we should."

Mother Ashley McCrary lauded the camp, which her 6-year-old daughter, Da'nya, attended last summer.

"The summer program really pushed her learning," McCrary said. "Her reading got so much better. Her math got so much better, and she was just a happy kid. She was happy to go learn."

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JCPS Superintendent Donna Hargens and Mayor Greg Fischer applaud as they hear that new money is available for kindergarten readiness summer camps. January 8 2016 (Photo: By Michael Clevenger, The Courier-Journal)

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