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JCPS kindergarten readiness camp to expand to 1,200 students this year

Posted: Jan 08, 2016 11:10 AM

Updated: Jan 08, 2016 1:19 PM

LOUISVILLE (WDRB) – Citing the measurable success of last summer's Kindergarten Readiness Camp program, the C. E. and S. Foundation, along with the Jefferson County Public Education Foundation and Jefferson County Public Schools, announced a plan for a significant expansion of the program for 2016.

The four-week readiness camp will expand to serve about 1,200 students this summer – 12 times as many as were served by the program in 2014. If the outcomes of the expanded program are similar to prior years, this could serve as an important strategy for improving the district's overall kindergarten readiness rate.

A JCPS data analysis suggests that if Kindergarten Readiness Camp scores are consistent in the expansion, the district could see an increase in the overall readiness of the incoming kindergarten class by 5.3 percentage points – which could move the district above the current state average.

While the overall readiness level of incoming JCPS kindergarten students slipped to 47.9 percent this year, the rate for students who participated in Kindergarten Readiness Camps was 71 percent as measured by the state-required BRIGANCE screen. This readiness rate is particularly notable because almost all of the Camp students qualified for free or reduced price lunches. District-wide, only 39 percent of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunches were deemed "ready" this year.

"When we can identify and directly support the preschoolers who need the most help preparing for school, we see multiple positive impacts, not just for them, but for the entire district," said Dr. Donna Hargens, JCPS Superintendent. "The students who attend camp are more confident and ready for school when they get to kindergarten. And that translates into better chances for success every year after kindergarten as they stay at or above grade level all the way to graduation and beyond kindergarten."

The success realized this summer with 300 students built upon promising results of Kindergarten Readiness camps with 100 students in each of the two prior years – as well as promising results from a "Kindergarten College" program funded by the Lift a Life Foundation. Recognizing the potential for programming that increases kindergarten readiness district-wide, JCPS developed a three-year plan to expand Kindergarten Readiness Camps to more students in need. In 2015, the C.E. and S. Foundation provided a \$250,000 grant to fund Year One of the expansion.

The investment required to expand the program to 1,200 students this summer is approximately \$1 million. The C. E. and S. Foundation will double its 2015 financial commitment to the program, and this year make a grant of \$500,000 to the Jefferson County Public Education Foundation. The Jefferson County Public Education Foundation has committed to raising an additional \$500,000, said Executive Director Sam Corbett.

"This is a generous private sector investment in public education," said Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer. "It's innovative, data-driven, and consistent with the philosophy of our Cradle to Career initiative: helping young people get started strong is the most important investment we can make in our future."

"Children who are ready for kindergarten are much more likely to achieve the academic success that carries them through to high school, college, and career success. The results from the last three years show us that this program works as a strategy for improving school readiness. With this grant from the C.E. and S. Foundation and funding from others, JCPS can continue to scale Kindergarten Readiness Camps to serve more children and develop a plan for incorporating the programming as a meaningful and systemic change to improve our district," said Tess McNair, the executive director of The C.E. and S. Foundation. "This grant supports the emphasis that JCPS's Vision 2020 puts on early childhood education."

Kindergarten readiness is measured with the BRIGANCE screener, which assesses skills such as whether children can recite the alphabet, name common colors, remember a parent's

phone number and identify body parts – not just arms and legs, but less obvious ones such as “heel.”

Dr. Hargens, Mayor Fischer and other community leaders today visited George Unseld Early Learning Center, 5216 Ilex Avenue, one of the locations that hosted a four-week Kindergarten Readiness Camp last year. They celebrated the success of the program and visited with pre-school students in school-year programs held at the center. Many of these students will likely be enrolled in the Kindergarten Readiness Camps in 2016.

Corbett said this is the kind of role that organizations like JCPEF should be playing in public school systems. “Louisville has set an ambitious and important goal to measurably improve education outcomes. To accomplish that, we need all segments of our community to engage in a meaningful way that supports JCPS in increasing success for all students. The business and philanthropic communities are uniquely positioned to support and inform the innovation required to transform our district.”

Parents can learn more about kindergarten readiness, including a list of skills they should review with their children, at: <http://ready4k.jefferson.kyschools.us>. JCPS also offers Early Childhood Programs for younger students. Some students qualify for free tuition. Learn more at: <http://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/departments/earlychildhood/GeneralInfo.html>

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