



Lexington Public Schools

146 Maple Street ♦ Lexington, Massachusetts 02420

Carol A. Pilarski
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction,
and Professional Development

(781) 861-2558
email: cpilarski@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us
fax: (781) 863-5829

To: Dr. Paul B. Ash
Members of the Lexington School Committee

From: Carol A. Pilarski

Re: Status Report Kindergarten FY10

Date: September 8, 2009

On September 1st, the Lexington Public Schools welcomed 377 Kindergarten students to the Class of 2022! In visiting most of our twenty-one kindergarten classrooms in the first few days of school, I am delighted to report that smiles on the faces of both students and teachers were abounding. Very few tears of separation, if any, were reported being shed by our five-year old students. Ironically enough, but not surprisingly, it appeared that parents had the more difficult time of saying “good-bye.”

In the chart provided below, you will note that we have a total of twenty-one kindergarten classrooms distributed among our six elementary schools. As recently as this past week, we have registered an additional seven K students whose families are new to Lexington.

September 8, 2009	Class Sizes/Sections	Number of K Classrooms	Confirmed FDK	Confirmed HDK	TOTAL
BO	17, 17, 17, 17	4	59	9	68
BR	17, 17, 17, 18	4	66	3	69
EST	17, 16, 19, 17	4	61	8	69
FI	18, 17, 16	3	48	3	51
HAR	20, 19, 18	3	56	1	57
HAS	20, 21, 22	3	63	0	63
TOTAL	377	21	353	24	377

As reported to you back in June, our first year’s implementation of a full-day kindergarten program (FDK) was highly successful, based on responses to the parent and teacher surveys that were completed by all kindergarten teachers and 339 of 383 parents representing an 88.5% rate of return. Most significantly, as you will recall, 93% of these parents reported that they either

“strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they were very pleased with their child’s FDK experience. In addition to the aggregated scaled responses to the survey, parents were invited to respond anecdotally, as well. I have chosen to highlight below several of those comments from the June report that occurred with some degree of frequency in the open-response sections of the survey.

Parents:

- expressed their satisfaction with a “wonderful academic experience”
- felt their children were “very enthusiastic about school”
- remarked that children would be “better prepared for first grade”
- were “impressed with their child’s growth in reading/writing”
- reported that their child was “more confident and independent”
- commented that the K team of teachers was doing a “great job”
- wanted “FDK to continue”
- reported that their child “made lots of friends”

The above information is particularly noteworthy given the article entitled “*Pressure-cooker kindergarten*” that appeared in the August 30th edition of The Boston Sunday Globe. The Lexington kindergarten team of teachers, the elementary principals, the superintendent, and I were dismayed not only by the timing of the article, but by the unfortunate mis-impression this article may have had on parents of kindergarten students who are clearly and rightfully concerned about the misleading suggestion that increasing “stress,” “pressure,” or “competitiveness” is having a destructive and disturbing impact on today’s kindergarteners.

I **assure** you that such is absolutely NOT the case in our Lexington kindergarten program. To the contrary, a great deal of thoughtful and deliberate planning went into the development of Lexington’s program to **ensure** that the developmental needs of young children were met in every category of learning: social, emotional, academic, and individual. The atmosphere that you will find in each of our twenty-one classrooms is caring, respectful of differences, nurturing, encouraging, supportive, and fun. Our teachers are adamant about guaranteeing that the most appropriate and most effective way to engage and teach children at this age is to pay very close attention to each student’s individual needs, by fostering and acknowledging the value of individual learning styles and the wide range of developmental growth through a variety of activities and educational opportunities.

There is a vast difference between the assessments that teachers conduct in our classrooms to inform their instruction and “high stakes testing,” like MCAS. One-on-one teacher meetings (informative assessment) with children are common and are designed to determine what each child needs in order to experience success and then to determine how instruction will be differentiated so that each child feels positive about his/her learning. The full-day program provides for time each day for children to play and make their own choices. Our teachers recognize that children who engage in creative play have greater language skills, show more empathy, and more imagination. Our program offers plenty of time for this kind of experience. Our classrooms are set up with materials and time that encourage imaginative play and activity centers for all learners. Maintaining a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program and one that is also cognitively challenging is NOT a mutually exclusive endeavor. We, here in Lexington are committed to this important balance and work daily to assure that we meet this goal.

I look forward to meeting with you on Tuesday evening and welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you might have.