

District 518 Early Childhood Education expands again this year

By Tara Thompson, Early Childhood Coordinator

Several early childhood programs have been available for several years in District 518, like Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), Even Start Family Literacy and School Readiness (SR). Programming has changed and evolved as funding has fluctuated and new statutes have been put into place. In recent years, research has validated the importance of early education and clarified how to best meet the developmental needs for the 0-5 year olds.

Last year, due to new funding from the State of Minnesota, the local School Readiness program initiated a class targeting children who would attend Kindergarten the next Fall, but who weren't attending any type of early childhood program. The class met one time per week for a 3-hour session from October through mid-May. Sixty four slots were made available to meet the calculated need of 75 children that were not participating in any formal preschool learning experience. A one-day-per-week option, with 32 enrollment slots, will be offered again this year beginning in October.

On September 3, 2014, a new two-day-per-week School Readiness preschool program started. It enrolls 3 or 4 year old children in either a morning or afternoon session. The two-day-per-week School Readiness program, which has 32 enrollment slots, will meet September through mid-May. The goal of this program is to give children the experience of attending school, without their parents, in preparation for Kindergarten. These School Readiness programs focus on self-help skills, social/emotional skills, fine and large motor skills development, and cognitive activities.

The Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program continues to offer weekly classes for parents and children to attend together. The primary focus is what parents can do to help their child succeed. Parents play an important role in helping their children to become independent, enthusiastic and curious learners. ECFE is open to any family living in District 518 who has a 0-5 year old child. Class information is included in Community Education's Classes & Activities catalog. The Fall 2014 session begins September 29.

The Even Start Family Literacy program follows the same philosophy as ECFE, but incorporates four integrated components for families that are dual language learners and in which the parent hasn't achieved a high school diploma. These families participate in early childhood time, parenting, parent/child time, and Adult Basic Education (ABE). This program meets three-times-per-week for three hours each time and has an attendance policy. This year the program has enrollment slots for 32 pre-school-aged children.

All of the early childhood programs have sliding fee scales based on household size and income. No one will be denied participation due to the inability to pay. Each program targets children and families that live in District 518. Certain criteria may apply for participation in the various programs.

Young children don't learn like older children and adults. Their intellectual growth is connected to and dependent on their social, physical and emotional development. A child's success in future years is dependent upon the foundational skills that are built in the early years! A child's play may seem frivolous and disorganized to adults, but it teaches the child important concepts that they need to know.

District 518 Community Education is proud to offer such a wide-selection of quality early learning opportunities for families with young children.

