

## **Recommendation - Addition of One Inclusion Preschool Classroom at Lincoln School**

The administration recommends that D90 add an Inclusion Preschool classroom at Lincoln School due to our current capacity constraints and the increasing demand for Inclusion Preschool services to qualifying students in River Forest. Below are the considerations guiding this proposal:

### **Inclusion Preschool Model - Background**

The D90 Inclusion Preschool serves 3, 4, and 5-year-old children from River Forest, fostering an inclusive environment that supports students of all abilities, including those we are required to service through special education programming. Key program elements include:

- A low student-to-teacher ratio to meet diverse learning needs
- Tailored, thematic learning activities designed for the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of early learners at all levels
- Co-teaching with special education-related service professionals, such as the speech language pathologist, occupational therapist, and social worker
- Emphasis on strengthening students' academic skills, creative imaginations, peer relationships, communication and executive functioning
- Alignment with ISBE recommendations and best practices for preschool learners, including those receiving service through special education programming

### **Inclusion Preschool Staff**

Our current inclusion preschool is staffed with professionals who bring expertise in early childhood and special education. To support both the AM & PM classes, the team includes:

- A lead teacher with dual licensure in early childhood and special education, plus an endorsement in EL
- A part-time Speech Language Pathologist (.5 FTE)
- An occupational therapist for 1.5 - 2 days per week (depending on IEP minutes)
- A social worker for 2 hours per week
- Two full-time Educational Support Professionals (ESPs)

Anticipated staffing costs for the additional classroom total approximately \$210,000.

### **Benefits of Related Service Providers in the Classroom**

While related service providers offer direct support based on IEP minutes, the inclusion model allows them to support all learners through whole class, small group, and individual support

within our MTSS framework. This benefits all students by integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

### **Student Enrollment in Inclusion Preschool**

The District 90 goal is to maintain a class size of 18 students in each class (both AM and PM sessions). We follow the ISBE 70/30 rule, with a maximum of 30% of students in each class receiving special education services. To achieve this:

- The District starts the year with 12 tuition-paying, general education students, selected through a lottery process. Every year there is a wait list.
- The District reserves 6 seats for students with IEPs, particularly students requiring multiple special education services.
- Students who receive support only for speech and language are serviced through a walk-in model, rather than enrollment in the preschool classroom.
- Students are identified for specialized learning through various means, including transitioning from Early Intervention, moving in district with an existing IEP, evaluation after being enrolled in the program, parent-requested screenings/evaluations, and lottery application screening.

### **Implications from Enrollment Data for 2024-2025 School Year**

Several factors highlight the need for an additional preschool classroom at Lincoln in the coming year. Based on the data below, we will start the school year in August 2024 at full capacity (based on application of the ISBE 70/30 rule).

- 13 students currently enrolled will remain in the program. 6 of the 13 students have IEPs, and 7 students are in general education.
- 8 student screenings are scheduled; it is expected that several will likely become full evaluations to be completed in the coming months.
- 10 students from Early Intervention will transition to District 90 by September 1st. A preliminary review of current records of those with birthdays before the end of the year indicates that 5 students will qualify for the Inclusion Preschool class and 1 for speech only services. There are 4 additional students with summer birthdays who have not yet started transition so a preliminary review of their needs has not yet been completed.

### **Summary**

Our current Inclusion Preschool program will be full on the first day of school in August 2024. Beyond the numbers above, we cannot anticipate the total number of students who may transition from Early Intervention next year. Once a child in Early Intervention turns 3 years old, they transition to public school and the state database only projects 6 months at a time. It is also possible that new students may move to River Forest who already have IEPs in force. To

maintain the ISBE 70/30 rule and serve preschoolers requiring special education services in compliance with ISBE guidelines and best practice, it is recommended that we expand our Inclusion Preschool program by adding the classroom at Lincoln School. Locating the classroom at Lincoln would be preferred due to space limitations at Willard School and the desire to effectuate home-school continuity, when possible.

*This expansion would necessitate:*

- Dedicated classroom space
- A lead teacher with dual certification in early childhood and special education
- One or two ESPs
- A part-time Speech Language Pathologist
- The potential for increased Occupational Therapy at Lincoln, subject to annual review and alignment with student IEPs