

DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

By Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent of Schools
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The 2019-20 school year is just around the corner, and as usual I am very excited for what the new year will bring.

I am especially excited about one of the biggest projects District 202 has seen in many years which will help our littlest learners – our 18th elementary school.

The new school will serve kindergarten through fifth graders and will be built on land adjacent to Ira Jones Middle School on Wallin Drive west of downtown Plainfield.

It will be our first new school since Plainfield East High School and Eichelberger Elementary School opened in 2008.

What's more exciting though, is that this school is part of a larger initiative to provide full-day kindergarten for all eligible District 202 students.

District 202 has long been aware of the many significant benefits of early childhood education.

Our thinking has not changed, but the world around us finally has.

We have known for a long time that teaching children how to learn, socialize, think creatively and problem solve when they are 3, 4 and 5 years old pays enormous dividends later in their school careers, and frankly, in life generally.

Unfortunately, we simply do not have the physical space in our current 17 elementary schools to accommodate the 1,500 or so students that we expect would qualify for full-day kindergarten.

Some people have asked why we didn't plan for full-day kindergarten when District 202 was building dozens of new schools in the late 1990s and early 2000s in response to record-setting growth.

There are two answers: first, we built for the growth we knew was coming. This approach saved us from "overbuilding" as some of our neighbors did.

And second, we built for society as it was at the time.

It's important to note that Illinois does not require kindergarten of any kind. In fact, the law only obligates us to provide a half-day program if we provide a full-day program. The law was written at a time when most young families wanted flexibility for work. Very few people thought of kindergarten as an essential part of a student's school career.

That thinking has changed significantly in recent years.

As well, our growth has stabilized, and the new state education funding formula will help us pay for the new school without having to increase the district's tax rate specifically for this project. (Individual bills may still increase as specific property values rise, but we won't raise our rate to pay for this new school.)

Adding a new, full-service school and adjusting attendance zones accordingly will create enough space to allow for full-day kindergarten in each of our 18 elementary schools.

This is obviously a huge undertaking with a lot of intricate moving pieces. We expect construction will take two to three years.

However, we have been working and waiting for the physical, logistical, political and financial stars to align. They finally have.

This new school project reflects our community's longstanding commitment to helping prepare all our students for the future, from the youngest to the oldest.

Best wishes for a productive, successful and enriching 2019-20 school year.

Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent of Schools
Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202