



Early Childhood Center FAQs

1. Why is an Early Childhood program necessary?

Legal mandates (Federal and State) require school districts to provide appropriate educational programs for children with special needs from age 3 through the start of elementary school. Many of these children need a classroom made up of typical peers to serve as role models. This legal mandate also requires the District to provide classrooms for children with special needs that include typical peers as part of the class. Families of typical peers pay tuition to attend the program. The end result is several different types of classes at the Early Childhood level.

2. What are the different types of Early Childhood programs?

Naperville District 203 provides the following type of Early Childhood programs: 1) Instructional, 2) Extended Instructional, 3) Blended – with typical peers, 4) Phonological – significant speech issues, 5) At-risk or Springboard classes (paid by State grant).

3. Does the Early Childhood program make a difference for children?

Yes. About 90% to 95% of the children coming from Early Childhood go on to their home school's kindergarten program with varying levels of support. The investment at this early level has an incredible payback. Some children no longer need Special Education services at all as a result of Early Childhood education. One study indicated that for every \$1 spent at the Early Childhood level, \$7 was saved on services needed in the future.

4. Are there classes for children without special needs?

Yes, State funding provides classrooms for children who are at-risk for various reasons. These are children whose families cannot afford private preschool. They may not speak English or they may have other family stressors that would impede them from academic progress. These programs give the students a head start on their academics and provide incredible benefits as they move onto kindergarten. The State pays for most of these programs, with the District providing some support. There are classrooms that are a combination of children with special needs, who require a general education class, and typical peers, who pay tuition.

5. Why can't the program stay at Elmwood School, where it has always been?

- The Early Childhood program has outgrown the space at Elmwood Elementary School by a considerable margin.
- Five years ago, there were five classrooms at Elmwood. Last year, there were 11 classrooms located at five elementary schools across the District.
- Five years ago, there were 137 children in classrooms; last year the program had grown to 260 children in classrooms (including 100 itinerant students).
- The number of children receiving services in classrooms in the past five years has nearly doubled, and the program continues to grow. Classroom space is a major issue and a challenge every time it becomes necessary to open a new class.

6. Are there other programs besides classroom programs?

Along with these classroom programs, speech and language services are provided for approximately 100 children, ages three and four. Through a State grant, a "Parents as Teachers" program with in-home parent education for at-risk children from birth through age five is also offered. All of these programs require additional space and resources. These programs are also scattered at various elementary schools across the District, wherever there is space.

7. Why the growth in the Early Childhood program?

More children are being identified with special needs at an earlier age and more parents are seeking help because of their awareness that the earlier the intervention, the greater the progress their child will make.

- There is a significant increase in children being identified with autism. All of these children benefit significantly from early intervention and Early Childhood education.
- Medical advances are helping more children survive, along with an increase in premature births and children who are medically fragile.
- There has been growth in Early Childhood education across the country.

8. Are there other problems with the facilities themselves?

The classrooms are not designed for young children. Every kindergarten class in District 203 has a bathroom and a sink inside the classroom. There are several classes for three- and four-year-olds that do not have bathrooms or sinks. The playgrounds and size of the classrooms are not designed for very young children. Drop-off procedures for children are different at each school and some are not as safe for young children as they should be. Many of the classrooms that are located in elementary schools are sharing a kindergarten room for half the day. Staff has to rearrange the room daily to accommodate younger children and their equipment.

9. How does the lack of one centralized location affect the staff?

Teachers of Early Childhood are sometimes isolated in buildings with no teacher with whom they can team. The lack of other teachers who are teaching at the same level greatly impedes the ability to collaborate and improve the program. Support staff spends an inordinate amount of their day traveling from building to building to support the program and students. On occasion, a teacher or assistant might be in one Early Childhood class in one building in the morning, and have to travel to another building for a different class for the afternoon.

10. Are there other impacts by not having an Early Childhood Center?

An Early Childhood Home & School Association does not currently exist; the scope of reaching out to all the parents at so many different schools makes it impossible. There are limited opportunities for any evening parent education events; parents are most comfortable attending events at the school their child attends.

11. Why is it necessary to bus Early Childhood students to a school not in their attendance area?

Children must be placed in classes that match their needs, so it is very likely that a child who lives in the River Woods attendance area might best be served by attending a class at Beebe School. There are some children (three- and four-year-olds) on buses for as long as an hour, because of the distance between stops to pick up other children and because they are being transported across town.

12. How would a centralized location help the students?

Consistency is very important for young children, particularly children with special needs. In some instances, a child needs one type of program which is at one school, and then their needs change. Rather than just changing classrooms, they have to change schools, because the program they need is at a different school. No parent wants his/her child to keep changing schools at such a young age, when consistency plays such an important role in their success.

13. What do other districts do about Early Childhood?

Many surrounding districts have built a centralized Early Childhood Center; examples include:

Naperville – Indian Prairie 204, Plainfield District 202, Bolingbrook – Valley View District 365U, Wheaton District 200 and Oswego District 302 have Early Childhood Centers because they recognize that it is the most cost efficient and it is the most worthwhile investment in the future of Early Childhood.

With the increasing recognition of how important learning is at an early age and the political awareness of this investment (Preschool for All legislation), this program will continue to grow.

14. Why can't we continue to serve our Early Childhood Program students in multiple locations and in multiple current elementary schools?

It is neither desirable nor educationally sound to do so for several reasons. Early Childhood includes five distinct programs because the students that it serves have such a wide variety of needs, ranging from complex autism to mild speech impairments. Often, students have to be bused to a new site each year because, as they transition through the program, the site that meets their most current needs is at a different location. This is very disruptive to the educational progress of our youngest and often most vulnerable children. From an efficiency standpoint, having all of the students educated in one location allows the therapists, speech pathologists, social workers and other support staff to spend less time traveling and more time working directly with students. The need for specialized rooms for physical and speech therapy and specially-designed bathrooms and playground equipment is unique to this age group. That is why the use of current elementary classrooms is not optimum and in many cases requires expensive modifications. In sum, both educationally and economically, one location for the Early Childhood Program is highly desirable and much preferable.

Proposed New Early Childhood Center



Preliminary Site Development Concepts



An introduction to preliminary site planning concepts for the proposed New Early Childhood Center at the Huntington Estates site.



January 14, 2008



Site Development Concept A



Site Development Concept B



Character of the site development

