

Suburban Trends
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LINCOLN PARK

Preschool dictate has BOE fretting

Funding and space potential concerns

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The school district expressed its concerns over funding and finding space for an initiative designed to help preschool children throughout New Jersey.

At the Sept. 23 Board of Education meeting, Superintendent James Grube explained how the New Jersey Preschool Expansion Initiative would affect the borough.

"Starting next year, we will have to provide preschool education to a certain percentage of (our preschool students who qualify for) free and (reduced-price lunches) and at-risk 3- and 4-year-old children," said Grube. "The state has projected how many students will be affected, and it is initially 20 percent. It's a sliding scale up, and in five years, we have to provide a program for 100 percent of our students."

Grube expressed his views on funding the program.

"The one good note is that the state has indicated it is going to substantially fund this program," said Grube. "I'm hoping that we don't lose aid somewhere else. My concern is that here is a program that will be costly to run, unless the state funds it."

Grube elaborated on how the state will distribute the funding.

"The Morris County school districts will receive \$12,600 per student, if we house the students," said

Grube. "You are required to have a certified teacher, a mentor, supervisor, nurse and no more than 15 students in a classroom. That number sounds pretty good, but unless you are housing 15 students, if you calculate what one teacher will cost, and all those responsibilities, it becomes tricky to balance."

Grube also went into detail about the structure of the program, and how Lincoln Park will incorporate it.

"There are mandates that it must be a six-hour program, and we currently run a preschool disabled program, but it's not a six-hour program, it's a.m. and p.m.," said Grube. "If we are going to tie it in that session, we are going to have to revamp that session."

Grube talked about the current space issue for handling the new preschoolers.

"We're going to run into difficulty space wise. We are going to take a look at how we will do it," said Grube. "You can't fault the logic of helping children out, but if they would provide us more space, it would be a little bit easier to swallow."

Finally, Grube explained his concerns with the transition of the students from the preschools into kindergarten.

Grube also pointed out, "I don't think anyone is against providing education for preschool children, especially at-risk children, and it will help the children adapt a little more smoothly in their number of education years."

However, some of the board members were cautious about the new initiative.