

## **Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, February, 2014**

Plainville Community Schools is committed to making sure all children are successful in our schools by being ready to learn. To that end, a committee chaired by Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Maureen Brummett, has been meeting since last year to explore an expansion of our current preschool programs. Currently, Plainville serves students with identified special needs in a variety of programs offered at Linden Street School. The committee was asked to investigate the provision of services to students who might not be ready for Kindergarten.

As part of their work, members of the committee have been visiting public school districts in the area that already provide these services. They have also been reviewing research about the economic and education benefit of providing high quality preschool services to students. Specifically, the committee reviewed the research of the Perry Preschool Project, which is widely regarded as a landmark study establishing the human and financial value of high-quality preschool education. The study followed a group of students for more than 40 years. Half of the students who participated in the study attended a high quality preschool, while the other half did not. The study found that students who attended Pre-K had an immediate educational benefit such as higher test scores and lower special education identification rates. The study also found that 71% of those in the program group graduated from regular or adult high schools or received General Education Development (GED) certification, compared with

54% of those in the no-program group. Additionally, the preschool program group had significantly higher average achievement scores.

A distinctive feature of this study has been its economic cost-benefit analysis. Adults in the program group were four times more likely (29%) to earn \$2,000 or more per month than were adults in the no-program group (7%). Almost three times as many (36%) owned their own homes, compared to those in the no-program group (13%). More than two times as many (program 30%, no program 13%) owned a second car. As adults, 59% of those in the program group had received welfare assistance or other social services at some time, compared to 80% of those in the no-program group. The analysis also weighed the cost of the preschool program against the economic benefits resulting from the program — higher earnings, reduced incidences of special education services, welfare assistance, and crime. The age-27 analysis found that every public dollar spent on the program saved \$7.16 in tax dollars.

The State of Connecticut requires every student entering Kindergarten to be assessed in the fall. Over the last few years, our fall assessment data indicate that about 30% of Plainville students entering our Kindergarten program are already behind their peers in readiness skills. These findings along with the committee's research prompted me to include additional preschool teachers in the proposed 2014-15 Budget. The research is clear and undeniable, and the trend in Plainville regarding the readiness of many of our youngest students is concerning. The preschool expansion we are proposing will target specific four

year-old students and help get them off to the positive start in school they deserve.

The committee will continue to meet to help the administration develop and plan for the preschool expansion. In addition, the committee anticipates presenting their findings and program recommendations to the Board of Education in April or May.