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## Long-desired full-day kindergarten finally happening in Centennial

By Gary Weckselblatt, staff writer Jan 27, 2017 Updated Jan 27, 2017

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(File) Centennial School District administration building

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Full-day kindergarten, Centennial's "dream deferred," according to Superintendent David Baugh, will become reality for the 2017-18 school year.

The school board unanimously passed the measure last week to begin a program the district has sought for close to a decade.

"I'm really excited that we'll be opening this new chapter in Centennial's history," said Baugh, who helped start a full-day program when he was superintendent in Bensalem. "This is certainly a passion of mine. It's a huge investment in education, and the community's response has been overwhelmingly positive."

Centennial is adding \$300,000 to its budget "for startup costs," Baugh said, and will "tighten its belt" in other areas. Additionally, he said, some staff could be repositioned.

"We're looking to help kids get ready for the rest of their academic careers," he said. "For many families, this will be their first exposure to our school district. This will be an extremely high-quality kindergarten program rich in academics and social and emotional learning. We're very excited about this for our youngest learners."

The district expects about 425 students to register when it begins its rolling enrollment process in mid-February.

Nationally, 77 percent of kindergartners are estimated to attend full-day programs. In Pennsylvania, 455 out of 500 school districts in the 2012-13 school year offered a full-day program — up from 352 during the 2005-06 school year, according to the most recent information from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Of Bucks County's 13 districts, seven will now have full-day kindergarten — Bensalem, Bristol Borough, Bristol Township, Centennial, Neshaminy, New Hope-Solebury and Pennsbury. Palisades is also considering adding the program.

In Montgomery County, Hatboro-Horsham will be starting full-day kindergarten next year. Abington, Cheltenham, Jenkintown, Lower Moreland, Upper Dublin, Upper Moreland and Wissahickon also have the program.

Centennial is hoping to realize savings from the elimination of its midday bus runs, said Cathy Perkins, director of teaching and learning.

Perkins showed school directors sample schedules, based on research, that allowed time for areas like motor skills and social development, in addition to a focus on the core subjects. "Social and emotional learning is so important for that kindergarten day," she said.

"The intention behind this sort of schedule is to help our kids acclimate to school to become more school-ready by first grade," Baugh said. He added that it will cut down on the need for special education referrals and have all students reading on grade level by the third grade.

"That's one of the things that I'm firmly committed to have happen," he said.

Centennial School Director Jane Schrader Lynch described Baugh, Perkins and Assistant Superintendent Jennifer Polinchock as "the team that made the dream happen. And the board has wanted this for a long time."

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