

Full Day Pre-K FAQ

2/12/2025

Does the current wrap-around program at Indian Neck adequately serve families needing a full-day option? What specific needs does the new plan address?

Yes, the current wrap-around (WA) program supports families needing a full-day option. However, due to capacity constraints, we can only provide this service for 20 students. The proposed expansion would allow 70 students (including 15 with identified special education needs) to access a full-day program. Research overwhelmingly supports the benefits of full-day preschool, including enhanced school readiness, reduced transitions, and greater stability for families. This change addresses the gap for the 67% of families currently enrolled in our school based half-day Pre-K programs who need additional childcare.

Will parents using the free Pre-K program and wrap-around care pay more or less under the new program?

We are in the process of finalizing a revised fee scale for BOE approval. It will be income based. So, whether or not a family pays more than they do for wrap around care will depend on where they fall on the fee scale.

What data supports the claim that the current Pre-K offerings do not fully meet Branford families' needs?

- 67% of current school based Pre-K families require childcare beyond the half day Pre-K model and must seek external providers. We cannot know the extent to which these provide “readiness” for Kindergarten.
- Students often experience multiple transitions, some requiring up to four different bus rides daily, with minimal time between sessions.
- Research consistently shows that full-day preschool provides higher cognitive and language development, improved kindergarten readiness, and reduced need for special education services.
- On average, Branford students are entering Kindergarten with limited foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. These gaps continue to persist through elementary school and are especially prevalent in our primary grades. Our universal screening provides quantifiable evidence of these trends. The following are some examples of these performance gaps.

- This fall, Kindergarten students on average scored in the 38th percentile nationally on the Letter Naming Fluency measure - a skill that would be heavily reinforced in the PreK curriculum. This means on average our Kindergarten students performed better than only 38% of other Kindergarten students who took the same assessment at the same time across the nation. This winter, when reassessed, students again performed at the 38th percentile on average. This does not mean students did not grow, but rather the growth rate was not high enough to raise the percentile rank.
- This fall, Kindergarten students on average scored in the 42nd percentile nationally on the Quantity Total Fluency measure, which assesses their ability to quickly and accurately recognize how many items are in a small set without counting. This is a critical foundational numeracy skill that would be reinforced through our full day program. Their Number Naming Fluency measure was slightly stronger, at the 50th percentile. This performance is not setting students up for success as seen by our first grade assessments. In the fall, first grade students performed at the 24th percentile on the Math Fact Fluency measure.
- The gaps that our students enter school with persist through the elementary grades. By Grade 3, only 62.6% of students are meeting or exceeding on the Reading Smarter Balanced Assessment (based on Spring 2024 data) and our Grade 4 cohort saw only 51.1% meeting or exceeding. On the Mathematics Smarter Balanced Assessment only 67% of Grade 3 students met or exceeded and our Grade 4 cohort saw only 51.7% meeting or exceeding.

The above mentioned research (more can be found on the PreK registration page) suggests that students attending our full day PreK model would enter Kindergarten with stronger foundational skills, more ready to take on Kindergarten and beyond.

If the selection process is a lottery how can you guarantee that those spots are going to go to a student who wouldn't normally have access to preschool?

We are ensuring there is an affordable option for families who would not otherwise have access to high quality preschool, while providing every family in Branford with preschool age students equal access if they register by the set deadline. A lottery will take place if there are more students registered than places available during the allotted registration window.

How many spots will be offered in total to general and special education students? What's the breakdown?

The program will provide 70 seats, with 55 allocated for general education students and 15 for students with special education needs. Additional seats may be available, depending on the number of eligible special education students.

When you add up all the seats that we currently can accommodate in all the elementary schools and the mentor/special education program at Indian Neck, are we losing or gaining spots with the change?

The current model accommodates more students across multiple schools, but many seats go unfilled due to scheduling conflicts for families. The new model consolidates seats into a full-day program aligned with parent needs, ensuring higher enrollment and reducing the need for external childcare.

Will parents have to manage multiple drop-offs and pick-ups?

No. Transportation will be provided to Indian Neck School, just as it is to elementary schools, eliminating the burden of multiple drop-offs and pick-ups.

Will this program create unnecessary transitions for students attending different schools in consecutive years?

Past data shows that students in the wrap-around program at Indian Neck have transitioned well to Kindergarten. Additionally, we are considering priority enrollment in PK-4 for PK-3 students who have joined the program as a special education student or peer mentor, thereby further reducing transitions.

Can you look at the success of the Tisko program and use it as a model going forward to boost enrollment at Murphy and Sliney?

The program is identical at Tisko and the combined Murphy/Sliney class. Given that 67% of current PreK families are seeking additional childcare to make for a full day experience, the low demand is likely due to families turning to alternative childcare options.

Would it be possible to form a committee so that parents and educators can work together to successfully implement the superintendent's vision in the future?

The full day PreK model is well backed by research. A committee was formed in the fall and parent feedback was solicited. Educators have put a great deal of planning and consideration into the full day model to ensure its success. An additional committee is not needed at this time.