

February 29, 2024

## **North Salem Launches Inaugural Universal Pre-K Program**

The North Salem Central School District announced the launch of its first-ever universal pre-kindergarten program beginning this September. After extensive research, planning, and community input, the district is developing a high-quality, play-based pre-K program that prepares students to be socially, emotionally, and academically ready for kindergarten.

“We are thrilled to be able to offer this program to suit the evolving needs of North Salem families,” said Superintendent Dr. Duncan Wilson. “Early childhood education is of utmost importance in preparing students for success, and we are confident that this program will provide our youngest learners with the best possible foundation for their educational journey.”

Deputy Superintendent Dr. Adam VanDerStuyf and Principal Dr. Roy Martin presented a proposed vision for a full-day program at Wednesday night’s Board of Education meeting. The program will serve up to 32 four-year-old North Salem residents in two Pequenakonck Elementary School classrooms. It will operate from 9 AM to 2 PM and focus on play-based learning, literacy, numeracy skills, and social-emotional development. The district is exploring before- and after-school care options. Eligible students must be four years old by December 1, 2024.

“We learned from our families that they want play-based instruction, social and emotional learning, and community involvement integrated with literacy and math instruction,” said Martin. “This encapsulates what we strive for every day. This program is a welcome addition to our PQ community.”

The district conducted extensive community outreach to identify local needs and desires for a pre-k program. More than 100 community members provided input through surveys and attending forum discussions. This feedback directly informed the vision and design of the program.

Several tasks still need to be completed before classrooms can open in September. One of these tasks is coordinating funding from the New York State Education Department, which has reserved up to \$329,400 for North Salem. The state funding will cover the program’s entire cost, with the exact amount based on enrollment and other factors. The NYSED requires that at least 10% of the program’s budget be directed toward a community-based organization. To meet this requirement, the board will form a steering committee to oversee the request for proposals from community-based organization partners. The committee will also assist with the Pre-K placement lottery and subsequent enrollment, and obtain final approval from the NYSED. If necessary, the program launch could be delayed until January 2025.

The district will share additional information and lottery registration details as they become available.