

Program brings in kids from suburbs

Program

Pre-K students from Irondequoit attending School 50

JUSTIN MURPHY @CITIZENMURPHY

When Adrian Smothers moved last year from Rochester's South Wedge neighborhood to Irondequoit, one of her main motivations was getting a good education for her soon-to-be school-age son Kingston.

Now 4 years old, Kingston begins prekindergarten this week — in a city school. He is one of five West Irondequoit 4-year-olds who will be attending class this year at Rochester's School 50, right across the town border.

It is the first time in a generation that general education suburban students have enrolled in city schools.

For Smothers and some of the other parents involved, the combination of a diverse education and free, high-quality prekindergarten had immediate appeal.

"It's not only structure for our son in a classroom setting, but it's a free program to save on daycare costs," Smothers said. "It was such a good opportunity, we couldn't pass it up."

The opportunity comes thanks to a federal integration grant the district received in 2014 as well as the efforts of West Irondequoit Superintendent Jeff Crane, one of the most persistent

See **PROGRAM**, Page **10A**



Prekindergarten teacher Rita Agostinelli looks over a book she gave to her new student Ella Eason, 4, of Irondequoit, as Ella and her mother, Brianne Eason, attend a meet-and-greet with Agostinelli at School 50 in Rochester last week.

SHAWN DOWD/@SDOWDPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Agostinelli gets a big hug from her new student Ella Eason, one of five children from Irondequoit who will be in her class this year at School 50, right across the town border.

SHAWN DOWD/@SDOWDPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Continued from Page 1A

advocates of racial and socioeconomic integration in Rochester and Monroe County's suburbs.

It is hoped the five Irondequoit toddlers will be the first wave in a movement toward more cross-district collaboration. The federal integration grant and a reconfiguration of the Urban-Suburban program have also created openings for suburban students at several city high schools, though none have enrolled for this school year.

■

The idea of Monroe County students crossing district lines to attend school dates to September 1965, when 24 firstgraders from Rochester's School 19 first took a bus to West Irondequoit through the Urban-Suburban program. For much of the past half-century, those buses crossed district lines in both directions. Many suburban students attended city schools like World of Inquiry School 58 and Wilson Magnet High School, which offered options other districts could not. Sometime in the 1990s, though, suburban students stopped attending city schools. While the program's original mission was to increase cross-cultural exposure for all students, it has been viewed more recently as a lifeboat for students of color from the city, where schools are routinely rated as among the worst in the country.

The only exception are some suburban students who attend highly specialized city programs, in particular the Rochester International Academy for newly arrived immigrants and refugees, mostly from Asia and Africa.

In the last few years, however, that asymmetrical view has begun to shift. In far-flung, homogeneous suburban districts like Hilton and Spencerport, some parents and educators worry their children aren't being prepared for life in a diverse world; several districts are more than 90 percent white. At the same time, a decade of budget woes has forced many suburban districts to trim offerings outside of core graduation requirements. By comparison, the city has a wide variety of specialized programs not offered anywhere else,

particularly at the secondary level.

The Rochester high schools now open to suburban students through Urban-Suburban, for example, include: » Edison Tech High School, the only career and technical education school in the county;

» P-TECH, a program at Edison where students leave after six years with a free associate's degree from Monroe Community College;

» East High School, which besides its University of Rochester partnership also features programs in optics, teacher preparation and culinary arts;

» Leadership Academy for Young Men, the only all-boys public school in the county;

» Wilson Magnet High School, with a full International Baccalaureate program.

■

For the moment, though, efforts are focused on a much younger cohort. Rita Agostinelli is the School 50 prekindergarten teacher who will have the Irondequoit children in her class this year. She met individually with them and all her other students and families last week, letting the 4-year-olds roam through their classroom while the parents asked questions.

“(Having the suburban students) makes no difference,” she said. “They’re all my kids, and they’ll all follow the same routine and be treated as the individuals they are.”

Brianne Eason and Jacquelyn Woodard are both mothers to Irondequoit 4-year-olds enrolling at School 50 this year; they also both work in the Spencerport Central School District, where the addition of the Urban-Suburban program two years ago set off a furor among some residents.

“The Urban-Suburban kids in Spencerport have just been awesome to have, so to be able to be part of the same thing in reverse is fantastic,” Eason said. “And it’s really hard to find full-day prekindergarten outside RCSD. It’s a great benefit the city has.” The School 50 partnership is technically a oneyear pilot program. The idea, though, is that if the Irondequoit families enjoy their year, they can remain enrolled at School 50 for the rest of elementary school.

Eason and Woodard said they’re not considering that option; after all, they moved to West Irondequoit specifically for the schools. Smothers did as well, but she said hasn’t made a final decision yet.

“We’re just going to be open at this time,” she said. “We’ll see how it goes.”

JMURPHY7@Gannett

.com



Prekindergarten teacher Rita Agostinelli gets a hug from her new student Ella Eason, of Irondequoit, who was sad at having to leave her new classroom, as Ella, her mother, Brianne and sister Olivia, 13 months, attend a meet-and-greet at School 50.

SHAWN DOWD/@SDOWDPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Ella Eason in her new classroom. “(Having the suburban students) makes no difference,” her teacher said. “They’re all my kids, and they’ll all follow the same routine and be treated as the individuals they are.”

SHAWN DOWD/@SDOWDPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER **“The Urban-Suburban kids in Spencerport have just been awesome to have, so to be able to be part of the same thing in reverse is fantastic. And it’s really hard to find full-day prekindergarten outside RCSD. It’s a great benefit the city has.”**

BRIANNE EASON, IRONDEQUOIT RESIDENT, MOTHER OF INCOMING SCHOOL 50 STUDENT

AND SPENCERPORT CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT EMPLOYEE

Tuesday, 09/06/2016 Pag.A01

Copyright © 2016 Democrat and Chronicle 9/6/2016