

# 'Passport to K' events return to WED after success last year

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**WOONSOCKET** — Woonsocket schools brought back the "Passport to K" events this year to help incoming kindergartners and their families prepare for the transition into public schools.

Last year, the Woonsocket Education Department piloted a district-wide model, where each elementary campus had the same programming and families could attend at any location regardless of where their home-school would be in the fall. This year, each campus formed a committee to plan the event themselves, and families were encouraged to seek out their home-school.

District personnel and interpreters were on hand at Tuesday's Passport event at Pothier to help parents register for kindergarten.

"This is a way to make awareness of the importance of registering," said Carmen Morales, a bilingual preschool teacher at Pothier who was on the Passport planning committee this year and last.

The state's registration

data by grade starts with first grade, but Beth Campanelli, a speech-language pathologist at Pothier-Citizens who spearheaded the Passport program, said Woonsocket's kindergarten registration numbers have been lagging.

Parents can register their incoming kindergartners at any time before the school year, but Campanelli said the district has been pushing to help parents register earlier so teachers and administrators can plan better for the school year.

Cathy Carvalho, principal at Pothier, said her campus has a slight advantage over others on that front because it's the only elementary school in the district with pre-k classes. But that doesn't mean they can slack on the outreach; many parents wrongly assume that if their child is in pre-k they are automatically registered for kindergarten, Carvalho said.

Though the activities at the Passport events are tailored to the students, the events are also about giving parents and teachers the chance to start building relationships early.

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# Passport

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"It's for the parents to get to know the school but also for the staff to get to know the parents," said Kathryn Kapiskas, an occupational therapy assistant who just started at Pothier a few months ago.

Leading the dance station Tuesday evening, she said she wanted to participate in the Passport event to meet some students she may be working with in the fall and meet parents, especially since her team doesn't always get as much interaction with them as the classroom teachers do.

Building the relationship with parents early is also an important strategy the district has been using to tackle absenteeism, which has become a priority at the state level. At Pothier-Citizens, the biggest elementary school in the district, 41% of students are on track to becoming chronically absent this year, down from just over 50% last year, according to state data. Students are considered chronically absent when they have missed 10% or more of the full school year, so the metric is calculated at the end of the school year.

Though state data does not measure absentee rates by grade, Carvalho said at the elementary school level, the problem tends to be worse in the pre-k and kindergarten classes, creating academic challenges that have the potential to follow the student into higher grades.

"Kindergarten of today is not like it was," Carvalho said, noting that kindergarten students start learning to read and write earlier than they used to.

Some of the Passport activities reflect that change, including one where students practice spelling their own names with letter beads. The events help give parents and students a look at what class will be like in the fall and allow parents to ask questions about the curricula.

Jessica Giguere, who attended the Passport event at Pothier with her daughter Jai'Lonnie Ruff, said she's noticed the change since her older two children went through Pothier years ahead of her daughter.

"The school over the years has gotten more hands-on with the kids," she said, adding that it's a positive change.

Alexis Marie, mother of Jayden Dewedoff, said she thought the event would help her son get acclimat-



File photos

In lat year's Passport to K program, incoming kindergartner Nevaeh Ruano (left) practices spelling her name with her Mom, Cassandra Dexter (back right) and brother Xavier Ruano, age 9, at Leo Savoie. Below: School Psychologist Lisa Karmozyn volunteered to dress up as Clifford The Big Red Dog for the Leo Savoie Passport to Kindergarten Event. "I'd be Clifford again," she said. "The kids love it."

ed to kindergarten. She said it was exciting and nerve-racking for him to be starting kindergarten soon, but through her job at Sojourner House, she's had plenty of practice advocating for his needs.

"We've made the right plans and places for him," she said.

school will have hosted two Passport to K events. The remaining events are at Pothier, Bernon Heights and Globe Park, with the last being on May 21 at Globe Park. More information is available on the district website.

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By the end of May, each

