

Steven Marrone

Proponent of Full-Day Kindergarten

By Carolyn Seagraves, Town Talk Correspondent



Steven Marrone

When the Pennsylvania Department of Education offered grant money to school districts for initiating full-day kindergarten programs, Chichester School District administrators knew they had to get on board. And, one administrator in particular, Steven Marrone, led the charge.

Marrone, the district's coordinator of title programs, assessments, and grants, wrote the grant to obtain the funds to establish a full-day kindergarten program at Chichester this year.

For other area districts interested in full day kindergarten, he says, "Writing the grant was the easy part," he said "After you get it, you have to make it happen."

The state offered block grant money to districts for educational enhancements, which included opening full-day kindergarten classes. Chichester received \$453,037 from the state and used some of the funds to hire new kindergarten teachers.

In September, Chichester opened school with ten full-day kindergarten classes, which serve students at all four of the district's elementary schools. The district and Marrone hit the ground running with the new program.

"We first met in December (with state officials) and I could envision this down the road," Marrone said. "There was no other way for us. We knew full well we had to push this."

Marrone, along with Chichester's Assistant Superintendent Barbara DiMarino, designed the full-day program with a strong emphasis on reading and writing. The program was designed on one already established in the Interboro School District. Former Interboro administrator Ann Kaufman is now the full-day kindergarten consultant for Chichester.

"We modeled our program after Interboro's, which was a forerunner for full-day kindergarten. I knew Ann and I asked her if she would consider being a 'mid-wife' in Chichester," Marrone said.

In addition to studying the Interboro program, Marrone said Chichester already had a model within its own elementary schools.

Linwood and Marcus Hook elementary schools had been utilizing an extended-day kindergarten program for several years.

District administrators have been closely watching the students' achievements and saw the benefits of a longer kindergarten program.

"Barb (DiMarino) is probably the most passionate supporter of full-day kindergarten," Marrone said.

Today there are 232 students enrolled in Chichester's full-day kindergarten classes and Marrone could not be more pleased

with the early results he has seen.

"We established a year-long assessment program. We're tracking progress right now and we have seen evidence of early returns that have made all the kindergarten folks believers," he said.

The program recently received recognition from Gov. Ed Rendell. On Sept. 15, Rendell visited Linwood Elementary and voiced his support of the program.

"Every child in Pennsylvania should be in a full-day kindergarten. We have a moral obligation to make sure every child here reaches their full potential," Rendell said.

Marrone strongly agrees with the Governor and thinks that full-day kindergarten programs are going to be established in most other school districts.

"I think everybody realizes it and knows it's the way to go," he said.

While the full-day program is only into its third month, the students have positively responded to the reading and writing challenges. Marrone said some students were writing on the third day of school using words posted on "word walls."

"I absolutely can't wait for the kindergarten results, but I see it already. We're going to be at our (literacy) goal and exceeding it," he said.

Marrone, who came to the Chichester from the Chester-Upland School District, introduced Chichester to an independent reading program called the 100 Book Challenge.

At Chester-Upland, where Marrone worked for 29 years as reading specialist, the Book Challenge program showed promising results.

The district has introduced the 100 Book Challenge program into the kindergarten classes. Chichester had previously used the program in first through fourth grades and saw how the students embraced the program.

Marrone said the 100 Book Challenge program gives students books that they can read on their particular level. He is a big proponent of the book challenge program and is scheduled to speak in December at an educators' conference in Vancouver, British Columbia regarding the district's success with the program.

Marrone's enthusiasm for the full-day program is clear from the moment the subject is mentioned. He works closely with the classroom teachers and aides, and credits them and the elementary school principals for much of the program's success.

"It's almost as if the planets lined up. I feel so lucky to be in the right place with the right people," Marrone said of

the Chichester staff. "It's going to be interesting to see what goals we've hit and surpassed, once we cross the finish line in June."

Marrone said the full-day kindergarten program exist today because of the support and guidance from district Superintendent Michael Golde and the school board.

"The board deserves a lot of credit. They have very open minds and they ask the right questions," Marrone said.

The majority of the Chichester parents have embraced the program. The district held public meetings before the grant was approved to introduce the concept of a full-day program.

Marrone grew up in Lewistown, PA. He came to Delaware County during his college years, attending Villanova University and earning a degree in social sciences.

He said that he was on his way to law school when he took a teaching job at Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Chester. He said teaching at the school was one of the most inspiring experiences of his life.

Marrone did additional course work at St. Joseph's University and attended the University of Pennsylvania where he received a master's degree in reading and language arts.

Now a resident of Wallingford, he and his wife Connie have a son, Matthew and daughter-in-law Licia.