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IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LEARNING

For many of us, our earliest school memories are filled with visions of our favorite teachers, building block towers, making shapes with playdough, and meeting new friends. These early learning experiences are often part of funny stories we retell and use to teach our children and grandchildren valuable life lessons. While we may not have understood it at the time, we undoubtedly know later in life that these opportunities have helped shape who we are today.

Early childhood education is a term that refers to the period of time from birth to when a child enters kindergarten. These critical years are when children first learn how to interact with other children and adults outside of their family, understand their emotions, and develop interests that become part of the fabric of their being. In last week's column, Berlin Area School District Superintendent, Dr. Emmett Durtschi, discussed ways the community has invested in our schools, and our early childhood programs are another terrific example of that investment.

The Berlin Area School District offers a variety of experiences and opportunities in early childhood education. At Clay Lamberton Elementary School, we partner with the birth to three programs from each of the three counties in our district to help children transition from county-based programs to school-based programs that include speech and language, occupational, and physical therapy services as well as other supports. Additionally, we hold Child Development Days annually in the spring for children ages two and a half to five, where certified staff complete developmental screenings and provide possible next steps for support.

On-site at Clay Lamberton, we provide an early childhood classroom experience centered on play to teach developmentally appropriate math, literacy, and social-emotional skills. These early childhood experiences prepare children to be learners in the Berlin Area School District and later be citizens in the Berlin community and beyond. Clay Lamberton is committed to serving our community with rich opportunities by meeting the various needs of our youngest learners.

Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K) started in the Berlin Area School District in 2011. At first, we offered a community-based 4K program that provided a safe, nurturing environment for children

in the district. At the start of the 2022-23 school year, we moved all public school sponsored 4K sites to Clay Lamberton to better connect students with more district services and programs.

Finding ways to provide more early learning opportunities for our community's children will continue to be a priority of the district. Therefore, we are thrilled to announce that we continue to grow our early child experience by opening one full-day 4K option for the 2023-2024 school year. Families can choose between a full-day or half-day 4K program. With just one full-day section, a lottery system and waiting list may be utilized if we have more families interested than available seats, to ensure small class sizes are maintained. After learning more about the needs of our community, there is the potential to expand this full-day program in the following years.

Knowing these decisions can be overwhelming, we encourage all families to sign up and attend the Child Development Day and 4K Registration on March 8th or 9th to learn more about the 4K program and other services available for children ages two and a half to five years old. All district residents, regardless of 4K affiliation, are encouraged to attend.

Investing in our youngest learners and providing them with appropriate social and academic experiences will lead to lifelong learning and college, career, and community success!