

For Immediate Release

La Farge School District in partnership with the Kickapoo Valley Reserve receives grant to plan and open the first public Forest School in Southwestern Wisconsin.

La Farge WI, June 15, 2020

A long-time shared vision of immersing children in the health and academic benefits of learning outdoors is about to become a reality in Southwestern WI for two dedicated educational institutions, the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and the La Farge School District. Working together the two entities submitted a charter school planning and implementation grant to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). In early June DPI awarded the successful grant of \$700,000 to the La Farge School district which will authorize the 4K-2nd grade Forest School to be located at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. The Kickapoo Valley Forest School (KVFS) will ultimately enroll 60 4K-2 students each year to engage in the kind of inquiry and play-based learning that studies are increasingly showing benefit child development.

The DPI grant will allow for a year of planning and development of the new school with funding for a lead teacher, support services, material and equipment purchases. KVFS will open for the 2021-2022 school year with 30 4K-K students, rolling into the addition of 15 first grade students for the 2022-2023 school year and 15 second grade students for the 2023-2024 school year, reaching a total of 60 students. As a public charter school authorized by the La Farge School District, KVFS will be open to students located in any school district at no cost. Students who do not reside in the school district will be able to open enroll, and a lottery system will be utilized if the number of applicants exceeds capacity. The KVFS Governance Board will be responsible for ensuring that the school's program and operation are faithful to the terms of its charter.

Based on its mission, the KVFS curriculum will be place-based within a forest school model centered around play. Three tenets of KVFS are:

1. Daily nature immersion through play to increase emotional awareness, social awareness, large and fine motor development, rich experiences with literacy, math, science and social studies concepts;
2. Teachers serve as mentors to facilitate individual academic skill development within rich and varied play in the natural world.
3. Collaboration with community partners that expand connections to the region including sourcing local food, integrating art and music from local artisans, connecting with local business that are dependent on the region and;

"For many years we have watched children connect to nature in meaningful ways through our nature immersion programs at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. We have always dreamed that one day we could offer children a daily immersion program that would allow them to do what they do best. Children are

natural scientists, engineers, artists and mathematicians. They wonder about everything and then experiment to answer their own questions. With a knowledgeable adult to act as their support and guide children's self-directed learning, problem-solving and constructive play can create an environment rich in learning that sticks! We are so excited to collaborate with the La Farge School District on an early childhood education program that emphasizes social competence and readiness to learn in a forest school setting, " noted Jonel Kiesau, Kickapoo Valley Reserve's Education Director.

Meaghan Gustafson, District Administrator of the School District of La Farge is excited that the community will have an additional option for early childhood and elementary education. "We know that experiential learning grounded in multi- sensory exploration has a positive impact on learning outcomes. It is exciting to offer a place-based nature-immersed curriculum rich in literacy, numeracy, and inquiry."

Community members interested in learning more about KVFS can visit <http://kvr.state.wi.us/Education> for initial information. As a Lead Teacher is hired and the planning year begins, significant updates will become available through the fall and winter with a full website, information sessions, and the first year's enrollment window expected in February 2021.

Contact

Meaghan Gustafson
District Administrator
La Farge Schools
gustafsonm@lafarge.k12.wi.us
608-625-2400

Jonel Kiesau
Education Director
Kickapoo Valley Reserve
jonel.kiesau@wisconsin.gov
608-625-2965