

2024 ASPRA*tions Awards
Copper Medallion Award Entry

Mission: Kindergarten

Laveen Elementary School District

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Summary

The Laveen School District experienced a drop in kindergarten enrollment after the pandemic. As a school district serving Grades PK-8, we know that students who join us in kindergarten typically stay with us for most of their elementary school career. In order to maintain healthy enrollment numbers in the future, and across all grade levels, the district knew they needed to do something to boost enrollment at the kindergarten level.

“Kindergarten Round-Up,” the annual Kindergarten registration event was on the horizon. This was the perfect opportunity to launch a comprehensive plan that would attract new families. The Laveen District had tired of the typical “Round-Up” theme that showed graphics of kids dressed as cowboys using lassos. We wanted to come up with something new that conveyed what kindergarten was all about – *launching* a child’s successful academic career. Our students aren’t cattle. They are explorers.

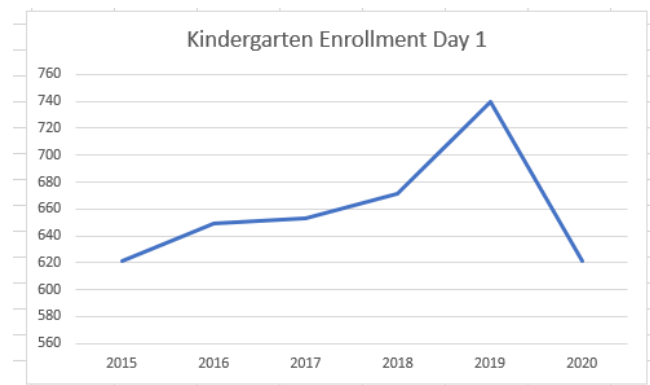
Introducing “Mission: Kindergarten.”

Research and Analysis

The pandemic affected student enrollment across the board, but Laveen noticed a significant decrease in kindergarten. After steady growth from 2015 to 2019, Kindergarten enrollment on the first day of school dropped in 2020 (from 740 to 621), while students in Grades 1-8 increased (from 5858 to 6432) from the year prior.

Laveen originally expected Kindergarten enrollment to be higher than in 2019. The 2020 Kindergarten Roundup event (held in February) had attracted 40 more families than the year prior (292 attending in 2020) and the district opened its ninth school which was expected to draw even more families.

The chart below shows the significant drop in kindergarten enrollments in 2020 on the first day of school compared to Day 1 since 2015.



Kindergarten is a milestone for children and parents alike. Across the nation, parents were postponing their child's 2020 kindergarten start. They didn't want their children enter kindergarten in the midst of a pandemic (Fall 2020). They wanted to keep their "babies" home and wait another year for them to fully experience the magic of kindergarten.

As a district, we know the importance of enrolling students at the lower grade levels. When a child joins us in kindergarten they typically stay throughout their elementary career. We needed to attract more kindergartners to our district. And, we needed to ensure that those 5-year-olds, whose parents kept them home for a year, would be joining us a year later.

But, by February 2021 we still had lingering pandemic issues. COVID vaccines had just become available to adults, a large portion of students were still participating in online learning, and most people still didn't want to be in large groups. The 2021 round up was held virtually with each school principal hosting a virtual meeting or YouTube video where they would showcase their school. Only about 115 people participated in the live events and some of these were staff members facilitating the presentation. Being virtual made it difficult to gauge attendance and interest.

Planning

Laveen School District aspires to be the "Community Choice" in elementary education. As part of the district's strategic plan, we embrace our role in providing the best educational options for children in Grades PK-8. Within this plan, "*Strengthen and grow partnerships with parents and the community*" is an overarching goal. This is supported by the objective, "*LESD will develop parent engagement plans that foster strong home-to-school connections.*" Two action steps identify celebrating parent involvement and investigating innovative approaches for communicating with parents as being key to meeting this goal.

In short, we want to find innovative ways to market our programs, including kindergarten, to prospective parents by connecting with them and encouraging their involvement.

Goals of the Campaign

Obviously, the main goal was to increase our kindergarten enrollment. But, it was time to rethink how we would do it. We needed a campaign that would:

- Promote Laveen as the best kindergarten choice in the community
- Engage prospective parents
- Develop that strong home/ school connection by communicating how important kindergarten is to a child's long-term success
- Make the child feel excited about entering kindergarten

Kindergarten Round Up was traditionally a paperwork night. Families show up to enroll their child -- filling out forms and providing necessary documentation. Schools might give tours and teachers may be on hand to meet families, but generally each school managed their own event.

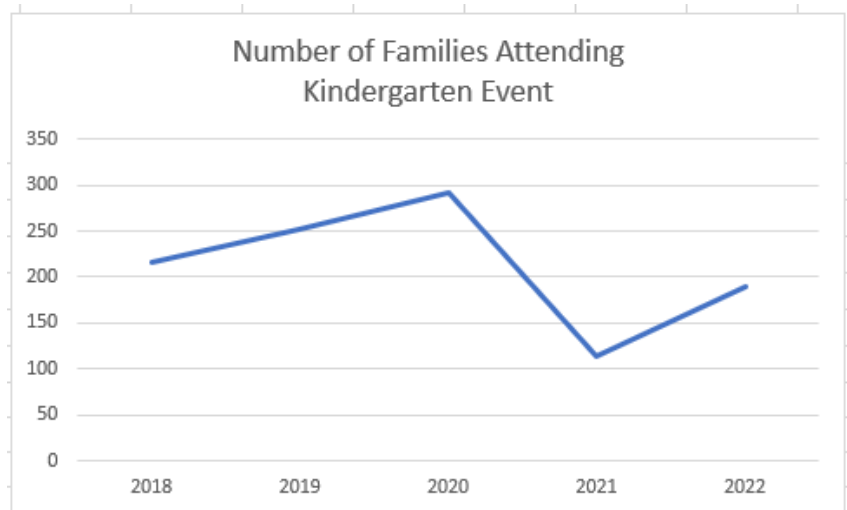
The 2021 virtual event was the first step in doing away with the “round-up” theme. It’s hard to round up people virtually. Instead we referred to it as “a virtual exploration of Kindergarten” and soon a space theme was developed to compliment the new name.

By February 2022, things began shifting back to normal. The vast majority of students were now attending in-person and larger events were taking place again. We were able to again hold an in-person event. We expanded off the space and exploration theme and “Mission: Kindergarten” was soon born.

To promote Mission: Kindergarten, we used an image of a small child with wings and an aviator hat standing next to a shadow of a rocket that became the primary graphic. The tagline was “Launch your child into a successful academic career.” This new theme was more attractive to parents of small children and it better conveyed our message of exploring instead of rounding up.

Understanding that for many prospective kindergarten parents, this is their first child entering school and they have a lot of questions that may not be specific to kindergarten. We developed a presentation that would help them understand not just kindergarten curriculum and academics, but bus transportation, school meals, before and after school programs, etc.

The 2022 Mission: Kindergarten event was more successful with about 75 more families attending. But, we wanted to take it a step further and really make it an experience for the parents and the incoming student in addition to increasing attendance. We wanted to make children excited about entering kindergarten as well as making an emotional connection with their parents.



For 2023 we created photo booths at each of our nine schools. We purchased cute space themed backdrops and made signs for the children to hold that read “I’m taking off for Kindergarten 2023.” These were placed in the primary wing hallways so that parents could capture the milestone any time during their visit.

We also wanted to lessen the length of the presentation so that parents could speak with staff and other families individually. Most of the general content was moved from the presentation to a new [professionally printed brochure](#) that highlighted concepts such as the curriculum, student supports, and how to enroll.

Implementation

The Laveen community is home to 18,000 residents with new home developments being built out. The Laveen School District has found mailing materials directly to residents via USPS is beneficial. Whether a person has lived in the community for 10 years or just moved in, attending our schools or a school outside our district, with or without children -they are learning about our district when they receive our materials in their mailbox. And, we also know the power of word-of-mouth.

We advertised the event in our district-wide newsletter, [The Latest from Laveen](#), which was sent to every Laveen residence just after the winter break and we sent a Mission: Kindergarten [postcard](#) via USPS to every residential address in the community a few weeks before the event.

Currently enrolled families received information via our [e-flyer system](#) and direct messages through our mass notification system.

We advertised the event on our [website](#) and [social media](#), using the same image of the boy with the aviator cap as the image. In 2023 we had just launched our [Instagram](#) accounts for all schools which gave us one more vehicle in which to promote the event.

Each of our nine schools has a digital marquee which also advertised the event to those driving by our schools.

We also posted information to [Nextdoor](#) to reach area residents.

Evaluation

The 2023 marketing of Mission: Kindergarten showed a significant increase in interest leading up to the event over the year prior.

Social Media Insights

We posted the event on the district and all nine school Facebook pages. In 2023, we launched Instagram which also helped with our social outreach.

	Facebook Reach	Facebook Engagements	Instagram Reach
2022	2055	45	0
2023	2461	250	741

E-Flyers

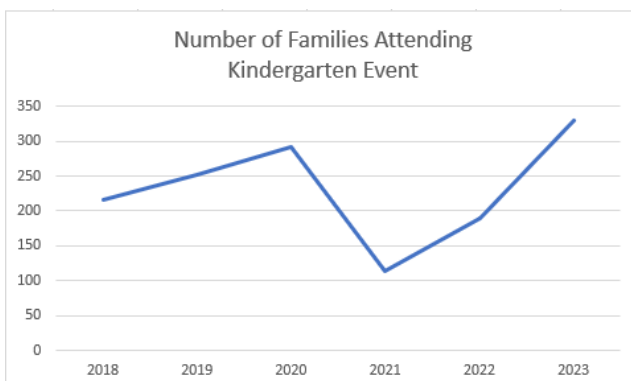
Using the Peachjar e-flyer system, we are able to send electronic flyers to all of our current families. These flyers come across as short descriptions with a thumbnail image. Data shows the number of emails opened and the number of recipients who open the thumbnail image for detail.

	Deliveries	Impressions (emails opened)	Views (full size flyer opened)	Actions (saved to calendar, etc)
2022	6,407	4,197	276	8
2023	6803	4512	667	5

Google Analytics

Information on Mission: Kindergarten was added to the graphic banner of all 10 homepages. This image would then link to an article about the event. Pageviews have shown an increase since Mission: Kindergarten was launched.

	Pageviews
2021	546
2022	780
2023	861



Mission: Kindergarten Attendance:

The 2023 Mission : Kindergarten was a great success! Across our district, 330 families attended – an increase in 140 families! Over 120 families completed registration packets that same evening which almost doubled the count from 2022.

Anecdotally, it seemed as though Laveen’s schools seemed more excited about hosting this event. Staff members embraced helping families celebrate this very important milestone and built off the space-theme idea, decorating their hallways, serving cookies with astronaut-themed napkins, and really creating an atmosphere that was welcoming to children.

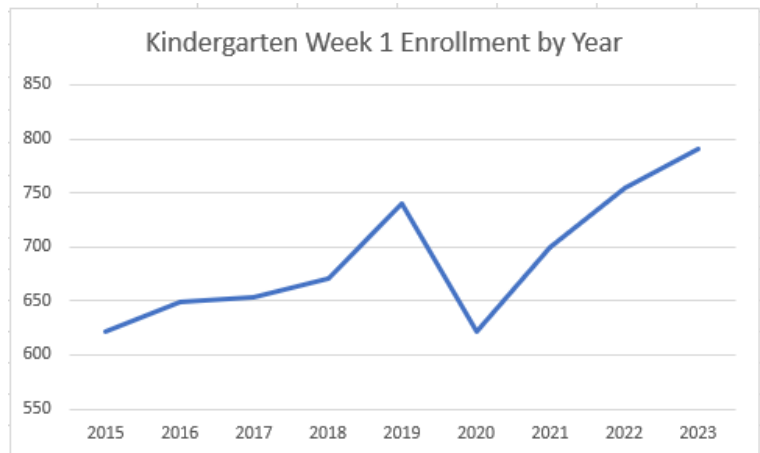
And, families loved the photo booths. Feedback from the schools was that most families took advantage of the [photo opportunity](#). Most of our schools asked to keep the backdrop for the remainder of the spring enrollment season. Some families even shared their photos with us.



2023 Kindergarten Enrollment

Since implementing the Mission: Kindergarten theme, Laveen has seen a steady increase in kindergarten enrollments.

In August 2023, we saw the largest number of kindergarteners enrolled and attending Laveen schools. In the first week, 790 kindergarteners arrived to start kindergarten, which was an increase of 45 students over the year prior and 90 students since 2020.



The best part of our new “Mission : Kindergarten” theme is that it can be used throughout the year. No longer does it publicize a two-hour event, but rather our full Kindergarten program which we promote all year long.

The brochures are now available at each of our schools and offices anytime, which is very helpful to new residents that are joining our district.

Mission: Kindergarten is our opportunity to make a positive first impression with our future students and their families and we want to continue to make this an event that celebrates a significant milestone and makes children to be excited about starting school.