

Panel adds money, nears full funding

May 25, 2007

Nearly every eligible 3- and 4-year-old in Oregon could enroll in a Head Start program under a budget that cleared its first legislative hurdle Thursday.

A joint budget subcommittee approved a two-year budget for the Department of Education that contains an additional \$39 million Gov. Ted Kulongoski requested to expand Head Start. The total would enable Head Start to serve 75 percent of eligible children, up from the current 60 percent.

The Oregon pre-kindergarten education program was established in 1987, and serves children from families with household income below the federal poverty level. Current enrollment is estimated at 7,300.

The governor's request would have covered up to 80 percent of eligible children, which is considered full funding, given that some parents choose not to enroll their children. Oregon has not fully funded Head Start in nearly two decades.

Because the number of eligible families has grown since the governor prepared his 2007-09 budget request, coverage under the proposed budget now is estimated at 75 percent.

-- *Peter Wong*

Copyright 2007 Statesman Journal, Salem, Oregon