

Laughter and learning

Migrant Head Start students hit the books

By STEVE KADEL H&N Staff Writer

ing the Head Start day, with lots of laughter and fun. While their parents spend long days earning a living, the Head Start program occupies children with breakfast and lunch, educational activities, and even health care if needed.

The federally funded nonprofit program is free for all 95 youngsters taking part. About two-thirds of those attend the Malin center, while the others go to a center on South Sixth Street in Klamath Falls. MALIN — Children raced happily across a grassy playground Monday outside the Migrant Seasonal Head Start building.

Some played on slides. Others rode tricycles. One girl bounced a giant inflated ball.

Natalie Cobian, 3, settled down to look through her book, "Oh, David." Her friend, Dayanara Chavolla, also 3, sat beside her with a book called "Los Contrarios."

It was a typical recess dur-

It's not limited to Hispanics, although they make up about 95 percent of those currently enrolled and many people think of Migrant Head Start as strictly a Hispanic program.

"We want to do away with this misconception," said education manager Barbara Fuentez. "We're here for all agricultural families who qualify."

The program is for low-income families that get at least 51 percent of their household income from agricultural jobs. Children range in age from 6 weeks to 5 years, with activities designed for appropriate age levels.

Some children attend the short migrant program from mid-August until November. Others attend the seasonal migrant program from March through November.

Children benefit from socialization and from academic activities, whether it's playing a game or naming colors and shapes.

"We do extensive lesson plans each day," said director Leslie Maxfield.

Migrant Head Start is offered in 12 Oregon counties through the Oregon Child Development Coalition. The coalition was founded in 1971, prompted by the death of a 3-year-old migrant child in a farm accident.

Fuentez said many families would have nowhere to leave their children without the program. Some used to bring them to the fields and leave them in cars during the workday. There is no money for paid daycare for most of the parents.

"We have families who've come here literally with the clothes on their back," Fuentez said.

They work with parents, linking them with services from other agencies if needed, and providing information about nutrition and other critical needs.

Mostly, though, it's about giving children the building blocks to succeed later on.

"We want to provide a safe, secure learning environment," Fuentez said. "Our goal is to prepare them for school."



Migrant Seasonal Head Start teacher Yvonne Maffey reads to students, Hector Briseño, left, Yarely Salazar, Dayanara Chavolla, Sandra Alvarado and Natalie Cobian in Malin Monday.



Three-year-old Natalie Cobian bounces a ball during recess at the Migrant Seasonal Head Start in Malin Monday.