





Head Start programs across Douglas County are getting a boost to help kids

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Once upon a time, kindergarten was a place to play, sing and read stories.

All that hasn't gone away, but it's playing second to skills kids used to get in first grade.

States across the country are looking to preschool to help children get ready for kindergarten, the way kindergarten used to get kids ready for the rest of their school years.

Oregon is no exception. In July, the Legislature gave an extra \$39 million to Head Start, a free preschool program for children from poor families.

Douglas County's program got a \$284,000 boost and added classes for 36 more children this fall.

Head Start added a classroom in Sutherlin and at Rose Elementary School in Roseburg. The program also hired a family services manager.

THE NEED

About 700 3- and 4-year-olds in Douglas County are impoverished, according to federal government standards, with parents earning \$20,650 per year or less for a family of four.

All of those children are eligible for the free preschool program Head Start, but only 354 are actually in the program.

Another 58 are on a waiting list.

The state will be funding more expansion, with money given in competitive grants. Director Deborah Hoswell is excited about the possibilities.

"We have pockets of children in the smaller communities," she said, "and we're trying to come up with creative ways to provide a Head Start there and make it affordable for us."



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Toni Newport reads to Head Start students during class at St. John's Lutheran Church in Sutherlin. The church rents out classrooms to the program. Newport has worked for Head Start for 12 years and she's now a supervisor for three sites.

ANDY BRONSON / N-R staff photo

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Winston has 20 children on the waiting list, and the South County communities of Canyonville, Tri City, Myrtle Creek, Glendale and Azalea also want more children in the program.

Head Start gives priority based on several factors, enrollment specialist Larissa Seeber said.

Four-year-olds get in before 3-year-olds. Income is one of the biggest factors. Head Start can allow 10 percent of the children it serves to be above the income guidelines, but no more. Children with disabilities are given priority, too. They make up at least 10 percent of the program. In Douglas County, about 12 percent of the children in Head Start have disabilities.

The program takes family circumstances into account, too. Homelessness, foster care and the developmental level of the child all play a part in the decision.

Hoswell isn't sure why more of the 300 or so eligible families in the county don't apply to get into Head Start.

"I know that part of it is transportation," Hoswell said, "that if we cannot provide transportation, then the families don't have a way to get their children to school. With the rise of the cost of gas, I know that's affected several of our families."

THE APPROACH

Head Start works with kids in eight different areas: physical health, nature and science, language and literacy, motor development, creative arts, early math, enthusiasm for learning, and social and emotional development.

Douglas County students made gains in every area last year. The program uses the Galileo curriculum, which sets goals in each area and helps teachers test whether the children are improving.

Head Start works with families, too.

Hoswell said children get medical, dental and nutritional services through the Oregon Health Plan.

That's been a challenge. It's hard to find dentists and doctors in the county who will treat children on the Oregon Health Plan, Hoswell said.

"What we're finding is the lack of services or services drying up within the county," she said.

Head Start used to get mental health and nutrition services from the county, but that's not happening anymore.

The services all relate to children's success in school, Hoswell said.

"It's all to prepare them so they're healthy and they're ready once they get to school," Hoswell said. "And they have the basics that they need and can just make that seamless transition into



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Teacher Amanda DeHaven, center, reaches for a chart as her students count off the number of 'friends' they see before starting lunch at Rose Elementary. At Rose Elementary, Head Start is partnering with the Family Development Center and Early Intervention in an effort to provide a regular classroom atmosphere for their students.

ANDY BRONSON / N-R staff photo

So you know ...

- The federal Head Start program began in 1965. It provides grants to local public, nonprofit and for-profit agencies to provide "comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children."
- In Oregon, 60 percent of funds for Head Start come from the federal government and 40 percent come from the state.
- Umpqua Community Action Network runs Head Start in Douglas County and has a budget of about \$3 million.
- Head Start has classrooms in Reedsport, Sutherlin, Dixonville, Green, Canyonville, Winston, Roseburg and Winchester.
- The U.S. Congress is currently looking at two bills, one in the House and one in the Senate, to reauthorize Head Start.
- The average class size in Douglas County is 18 or 19 students, and each classroom has three adults.
- Classes run from Monday through Thursday for three and a half hours.

kindergarten.

"There is an academic push," she said, "but it's done through socialization and setting up a rich learning environment, so through that the children get what they need."

Amy Mentes is a kindergarten teacher at East Primary School in Sutherlin. She sees a distinct difference between children who've been to preschool and those who haven't.

"Definitely preschool helps them," she said. "They know how to hold their pencil. They know how to socialize. They work together better."

She said children who have gone to preschool are able to talk to each other and to explain what they want.

WORKING WITH PARENTS

Head Start is run by Umpqua Community Action Network, and the whole organization is trying to communicate better about what services families are getting and what services they might need.

At Head Start, each classroom has a staff member assigned to work with families, as well as work with children during class.

"Some families have multiple services they're receiving from the community, and some of them have none," Hoswell said.

The new family services manager helps those staff members coordinate their work. They create plans with each family and let them know what's available.

Holly Way works with families in the classroom at Rose School. She said the most common needs are help with housing and paying for utilities. She also helps find dentists and doctors.

MAKING POLICIES

Parents have monthly meetings to find out what's happening, and some serve on the organization's policy council. The council helps make decisions for the whole organization, along with Hoswell and the UCAN Board.

Vicky Flynn and Sharon Pilson have both served on the policy council.

Flynn's great-granddaughter, Taylor Smith, went to Head Start when she was 5. She's 7 now.

"I was looking for something to keep this child active," Flynn said. "She was a little advanced for her age."

She said along with learning the alphabet, Taylor became more social.

Flynn worked as chairwoman of the policy council for three years and stayed on as a community representative.



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Head Start students Deidre, Trey Caleb, Deja and Fiona runs pipe cleaners through beads as another class eats lunch at St. John's Lutheran Church in Sutherlin. The Head Start program in Sutherlin has added another class and now buses in students from as far away as Drain and Yoncalla.

ANDY BRONSON / N-R staff photo

Class meets special needs

The Head Start classroom at Rose Elementary School doesn't look unique.

The 13 preschoolers play with books, puzzles, blocks, play dough, musical instruments, finger paint and fire trucks.

They say "please," "thank-you," and "Teacher, lookit."

But the class is more than it seems.

It's a collaboration between Head Start, Family Development Center and Early Intervention.

Family Development Center is a crisis relief nursery that provides a therapeutic preschool for children who are at high risk for child abuse and neglect. Early Intervention gives special education services to children with disabilities.

Both organizations have students at Rose's Head Start classroom, and both are supporting the teachers there with training and information.

"With what's taking place within the community with the high use of drugs, the unemployment, all of those factors, we're seeing a high level of behavior problems in the classrooms, so that's one of the reasons we wanted to develop this classroom," Head Start Director Deborah Hoswell

She helped hire Hoswell and made trips to Salem to promote Head Start with lawmakers.

"I think the parents need to be involved," she said. "They have a right to say what's going on with their children."

Pilson is starting her second year on the council. Her 4-year-old grandson is in Head Start now, and all three of her children went to Head Start in the 1980s.

"It kind of opens them up for getting ready for regular school, for kindergarten," Pilson said. "They're not so scared to open the door."

She said in addition to making decisions, the council acts as a "middle person" between Head Start and the parents, making sure everyone knows about decisions.

"If you're shy, you'll get over it in a hurry," Pilson said.

Both Pilson and Flynn were surprised at how receptive lawmakers were and how easy it was to talk with them. They said they've learned the value of getting involved.

CHANGES OVER THE YEARS

Toni Newport has worked for Head Start for 12 years, and is now a supervisor for three sites.

Newport had two daughters in Head Start. Her oldest, now 23, became an honors student, and Newport attributes it to the direction she got in her preschool years.

Her second daughter had had a major surgery, and the Head Start teachers helped her with everything from using a walker to kicking a ball.

"As a mother in the program, the staff were very supportive and helped my family with my needs," she said.

Newport served on the policy council, which helped build her self-esteem as a young mother, she said.

In the 1995-96 school year, Head Start expanded, and Newport applied to be a classroom assistant. After three and a half years, she became a teacher. Then the government made a new requirement that teachers have bachelor's degrees in early childhood education.

"Head Start provided me with that college opportunity," she said.

The education enhanced what she was doing in the classroom and made her a better teacher, she said. Seven years later, she became a supervisor.

She's seen two expansions and one cutback. She's also seen the adoption of the Galileo curriculum.

"You get to see each individual child's progress," she said, adding that the Galileo program helps teachers make sure they're covering all the skills the children need.

said.

Head Start agreed to limit the class size to 12 or 13, so the children with more needs could get more attention. They go to class along with normally developing children, Hoswell said.

"For Family Development Center, it's a wonderful opportunity to partner with two other agencies in town who have the best interest of children in mind," said Charlene Strasser, the center's director. "We're working together to maximize the dollars we have."

Strasser said the center has a waiting list of 187 children, so any service to those children helps.

"Every child receiving services, it helps to alleviate some of the stress for that family," she said.

The center helps provide therapeutic training for the staff in the classroom.

Matt Brausam of Early Intervention said the partnership is unique in the state.

Early Intervention selected children who would have a good chance of success in the program, and a consulting teacher spent the first six weeks of class helping the Head Start staff develop teaching strategies and curriculum.

Brausam said the children get to play alongside typically developing children instead of in a special education classroom.

The goal is to expand the program to other areas in the county so children can go to preschool close to their homes.

"That's always the goal, to get kids as close to home and be successful," he said. "In the absence of creating this kind of setting for them, these are kids that would have stuck out in a typical Head Start classroom."

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She said parents learn the importance of health care and good nutrition, and that follows them as they go through the school system.

"The only thing that is hard is we can't provide for all," she said.

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