

Preschoolers get a good start

By Diane Goble
Correspondent

We all hope to have bright kids, and starting them off right is a step in that direction. Now Sisters Country parents can take preschoolers to Bright Kids at 202 E. Fir St. for an early interactive and creative learning environment that will prepare them for kindergarten and beyond.

Owner/teacher Alicia Chatila has nine years of teaching experience and is certified in phonics training. Previously she managed a learning center with 90 children, then opened her own center with over 200 children ages 6 and under.

When Chatila moved to Sisters four months ago, she quickly found out there was a lack of childcare options. She had previously homeschooled her own kids, first- and fourth-graders, and decided she wanted a place where they could socialize as well as learn by doing fun, interactive, hands-on activities, and Bright Kids was born.

The two activity rooms are bright and colorful with lots of fun pictures on the walls. You won't find a TV or a computer among the seven learning centers where children can participate in music with instruments, arts & crafts, sensory skills, active play, imaginative play, numbers and shapes, language and story time, and other projects



PHOTO BY DIANE GOBLE

Alicia Chatila offers stimulating activities at Bright Kids.

that inspire creativity and foster learning through play.

All activities are open-ended and child-led, based on what each child wants to do rather than leading them. She also plans monthly themes, such as "under the sea" and "in the jungle," and will build interactive learning activities around them. "The most important thing," she said, "is learning through play."

Chatila's plans include offering the space for birthday parties with crafts or themes like Frozen or Spiderman; a chef's cooking class using all-natural ingredients for ages 5 through 8 in the afternoons; phonics classes for ages 3 to 6; and during spring break will have a bouncy-house and other activities outside the center. She is also working on a

reading program with Sisters Community Librarian Paige Bentley-Flannery.

Bright Kids is in the little green building at 202 E. Fir St. It's open seven days a week from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. on weekdays for early learners up to age 6, on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for ages 7 and younger.

For more information, visit www.brightkidsplay.com or call 541-549-2223. "Like" Bright Kids at www.Facebook.com/brightkidsplay. Donations of age-appropriate books, toys and costumes are always appreciated.

Committee approves education budget

By Jonathan J. Cooper
Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — A Democratic budget for Oregon schools is headed for votes in the full House and Senate, likely this week, after the Ways and Means Committee approved the \$7.3 billion spending plan in a party-line vote on Thursday.

The two-year budget proposal would be a 9 percent increase in state aid for schools.

The budget has raised sharply differing predictions about its impact. Republicans and education interests say it fails to keep pace with rising costs and will force many school districts to slash spending. Democrats say their budget isn't ideal, but it would provide enough money for nearly all school districts to keep their current staffing and service levels.

The Democrats promised to devote a portion of any new revenue to schools.

"This budget is built upon the extra billion dollars that we put into last

year's budget," said Sen. Rod Monroe, D-Portland. "So yeah, the growth is relatively small, and I hope we can find more. But remember we're building on the mountain we built last year."

The debate has made for unusual allies. Education interests, which are among the top supporters of Democratic campaigns, are seeing their cause championed by Republicans saying other areas of the budget should be reduced to pump more cash into schools.

"For me, I think our priority needs to be putting as much money as possible into kids, and I think if we took a hard look at how we allocate our dollars we could do that," said Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner.

Republicans have accused Democrats of intentionally underfunding schools in order to create a justification for raising taxes down the road, a charge that Democrats reject.

Oregon schools get the majority of their money from the state General Fund and lottery.

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