

**PRESCHOOL:**  
Parents have more options this year

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According to the Oregon Department of Education’s Early Learning Division, Preschool Promise grants are awarded in order to support “publicly funded, high quality, local and culturally-relevant early child care and education programs.”

The target population for the Preschool Promise grants are children in families that are living at 200 percent of the poverty level, as well as other underserved children in the community.

A slowdown in the grant-awarding process due to COVID-19 resulted in the school district having to postpone hiring teachers, which subsequently delayed the start of the program to late September, according to Principal Joan Warburg.

Despite the delays, Warburg is ecstatic that things are coming to fruition.

“We have our staff hired

now and we are thrilled to be offering this service to our families, as we believe passionately in equitable opportunities for all children,” she said.

Mylee Card, who will implement the program, concurred, saying “I’m so excited to be a part of implementing the Preschool Promise Pre-K classroom at SES. Being a kindergarten teacher I know exactly what I would like my students to be able to do when they enter my kindergarten classroom and we will be able to provide these foundational skills to our pre-K students.”

According to Warburg, Sisters Elementary will be able to accommodate up to 18 students and noted that families will need to apply and qualify through the Early Learning Hub of Central Oregon.

“The state is currently finalizing criteria and we will be releasing the information as soon as all the details are finalized,” she said.

SPRD, which has offered preschool for the past 10 years, will continue to do so, continuing its cooperation with the school district, but

at a new site on the grounds of Sisters Community Church in the former Sisters Christian Academy building.

Jennifer Holland executive director at SPRD explained that a number of factors contributed to the change of location, including the elementary school’s need to allocate space and Sisters Community Church’s desire to be of help to the community.

“Our attitude is that we are all in this together for kids and families, so SPRD will continue to work in collaboration with the school district, including on teacher training and staff development,” said Holland.

Due to COVID guidelines, the SPRD preschool will have one cohort of 3 and 4 year olds that will be in a full-day program and two other groups that will be half-days.

“The ‘Firefly’ program will be full day, while the ‘Dragonfly’ and ‘Grasshopper’ cohorts will be half-day,” she said. Rather than strictly being grouped by age, the cohorts will be determined by schedule needs of the families, according to

Holland.

Holland reported that as of August 21, a total of 40 kids had registered. Funds from the State of Oregon Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program can help qualified parents cover the costs of SPRD preschool, according to Holland. Financial aid is also available through the Bonnie Malone Scholarship fund.

“It’s been a lot of work, but we are ready to kick off a great school year for these kids,” said Holland.

She acknowledged the Sisters Community Church’s commitment to being a positive contributor to young people in Sisters.

“They are pleased their building can be used and they are developing ideas for other supports for young people including mentoring,” she said.

The SPRD program is set to start on September 1. Registration and other information about the program can be found at the SPRD website at [www.sistersrecreation.com/activity-category/preschool/](http://www.sistersrecreation.com/activity-category/preschool/).

Another addition to the preschool scene, also starting September 1, is the Wellspring Preschool and Child Care Center, which will be operated through Wellhouse

Church and directed by Mary Ryan. According to Ryan, Wellhouse church recognized the growing need for preschool education, as well as childcare, in Sisters and responded accordingly.

“An important core foundation at Wellhouse Church is building community, so it seemed natural to include preschool and childcare as an integral part of building and loving our community,” she said. “When Sisters Christian Academy closed, it opened the door for Wellhouse to step in and continue a quality faith-based preschool.”

Wellspring Preschool is open to ages 3 to 5 for both half day and full day Monday through Thursday, and the Wellspring childcare will serve ages 3 to 12 Monday through Friday, including hours before and after school.

The Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce lent its support to the new preschool by granting a \$2,500 to help provide families with scholarships.

Registration and other information is available at on the school’s facebook page (Wellspring Preschool and Child Care Center), via email at [info@westsidesisters.org](mailto:info@westsidesisters.org) or by calling 541-549-4184.

**Why is preschool so important?**

According to a Learning Policy Institute report from January 2019, research is clear that preschool can have long-lasting positive results for children.

Research finds that preschool programs that demonstrate the strongest and most persistent positive effects employ well-qualified educators, use a developmentally appropriate program, and provide adequate learning time for students.

This report confirmed the preponderance of evidence demonstrating that high-quality preschool leaves children better prepared for school, especially in terms of their academic skill development.

The report included reviews of rigorous evaluations of 21 public preschool programs, and that students who attended high-quality preschool programs reaped benefits that would last throughout their lives, and that they were prepared for school and experienced substantial learning gains in comparison to children who did not attend preschool.

Mary Ryan, director of Wellspring Preschool said many people don’t think of preschool as being more than fun and games.

“A person may be tempted to say, ‘Oh, it’s just preschool,’ but long-term analysis of preschool alumni shows that children attending a preschool, with dedicated academic curriculum, outperform their peers on every level from kindergarten readiness to college graduation and postgraduate degrees,”

she said. “In fact one study from the Brookings Institute broke it down into a very tangible return on investment when they stated, ‘Every dollar invested in preschool saw a return of \$3.39 in earnings and tax revenue from these children, who matured into adults who abided by the law, pursued higher education, and earned high salaries.’”

In its grant application, Sisters School District relayed its strong belief in the importance of preschool and the collaboration with families, stating, “We, the pre-K staff, know a child’s early learning experiences have a significant impact on their future success in and out of the classroom and so it is our goal to collaborate and partner with parents

in an effort to work together to prepare their child for their most healthy, happy, and productive future.

“Together we will build a community where learning is celebrated and all members feel safe, engaged, supported, challenged and empowered. When we create a community that celebrates learning we are fostering a growth mindset and establishing a foundation for life-long learning, productive citizenship, and overall wellness and success. We believe parents are their child’s first teacher and so the knowledge and wisdom they share on behalf of their child throughout the year will help us engage, support, and challenge their child as they access their full potential.”

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