

Preschool: District hopes to have a bilingual teacher

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through Preschool Promise, a pot of about \$17.5 million allocated by the state Legislature last year to expand preschool options.

The state Department of Education announced Wednesday that the regional partnership would receive an unspecified portion of the Preschool Promise money. To receive funding, the new or expanded programs must serve families within 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and mirror the new full-day kindergarten schedule.

Astoria Superintendent Craig Hoppes said the district is hoping for enough money to serve up to 20 4-year-olds. While the Preschool Promise money would help start the

preschool, the district would use state funding to keep it running in future years, counting the students as new enrollees.

Working together

Kate Gohr, principal of John Jacob Astor Elementary School, would be principal of the new preschool, which would be located in the bottom floor of the Capt. Robert Gray School, across the hall from Head Start. Two programs would work in unison, with Head Start enrolling the district's preschoolers, and the district providing transportation for Head Start's students.

"I think that it's an excellent opportunity for children and families, and it's beneficial to the school district," said Joyce Irvin, who oversees Head



Craig Hoppes



Melissa Linder

Start centers in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties.

Irvin said her preschools first serve children from families within 100 percent of the federal poverty level, then expand to families within 130 percent, if there is room. The centers in Astoria and Warrenton offer 36 and 72 pre-

school spots, respectively, but often run wait lists and have to turn some families away. Linder said the district's preschool could help catch that next tier of low-income families not being served by Head Start.

Target audience

Students from low-income families, and students learning English as a second language, often fall into the achievement gap, the disparity in performance between students of different demographic groups.

A wide swath of Astoria east of the Astoria Bridge has been identified as a "hot spot" by the state Department of Human Services, based on high rates of poverty, public assistance, mobility and families with school-age children.

"It's the only hot spot in the

county," Hoppes said. "We know there are places where we have to go get those kids."

The recent state Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, given each year to incoming kindergartners, showed Hispanic students in Astoria knew about 80 percent as many English letter names as the overall population, and two-thirds as many sounds, despite slightly exceeding their peers in mathematics. Hispanic kindergartners also lagged in understanding letter names and sounds in their native language. A common understanding among educators is how students with strong literacy skills in their primary language can learn English faster. The school district hopes to have a bilingual teacher for the preschool.

Center: 'I find it very tragic that it's going to go away'

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At a special meeting Wednesday, the City Council agreed to provide the children's center the remaining \$10,500 budgeted for this year to allow parents time to find alternative child care. The children's center had originally asked for more money, but the city lacks resources to provide the funds to a closing facility.

"I'm someone who has used the children's center and it's a wonderful facility, so personally I find it very tragic that it's going to go away," Kucera said.

He added, "It's fiscally inappropriate for the city to do anything more than we've done at this point. We have this money budgeted and this would be a good reason to spend that money, to at least give people who have children in there some time."

The city budgeted a subsidy of \$63,000 for the children's center for this fiscal year. April's payment was delivered in March. The city's remaining portion of \$10,500 is for May and June.

The requested amount did not include \$13,500 raised for the children's center this year by the Savor Cannon Beach Wine Walk, which could come as late as June and will pay for debts on monthly expenses and parent refunds, Bisping said.

City Councilor Wendy Higgins asked why the situation was not brought to the city earlier.

"My hands were tied," Bisping said. She said she hadn't had access to financial records before it was too late.

The Tolovana Park building will become city property.

Dropping enrollment

The children's center can hold up to 36 children but its current enrollment is 19, with six full time. Preschool enrollment is lower than usual.

"Either people are leaving for one reason or another or they're dropping their enrollment to part-time," Bisping said, citing efforts made to raise enrollment in her eight months as director. "Through the short time that I've been here, it has steadily decreased. That was a problem before I came."

The location contributed to the enrollment problem, she said, and families likely switched to more convenient locations, such as Seaside.

"These children could find additional care closer to them," she said. "There are not a lot of families in Cannon Beach looking for child care."

"There's a point of closing graciously," board secretary Jennifer Barrett said. "We looked at numbers and it's hard to forecast



Submitted Photo

The Cannon Beach Preschool and Children's Center.

'I am very emotional about the closing. I have spent five years of hard work volunteering to keep the center open. I feel it is a huge loss for Cannon Beach. I hope to be able to open a center again in Cannon Beach when possible.'

Barb Knop
board president

what's going to happen in the future. ... You're going to lose parents; you're going to lose teachers."

"At some point we're going to have a baby boom and we're going to need (the children's center) again," Mayor Sam Steidel said. "Thank you for all your efforts." Councilors agreed city demographics were not advantageous for a child care center, and discussed possible long-term solutions, such as attracting younger families with affordable housing.

Benefield said the citizen survey results could help identify solutions.

"Even if we can attract families, they have to be able to afford to live here," Higgins said, adding that many Cannon

Beach low-income families get child care from family.

Almost closed in 2011

The children's center almost closed its doors in 2011, board president Barb Knop said after the meeting, but the board cut expenses and worked together to keep it open.

"I am very emotional about the closing. I have spent five years of hard work volunteering to keep the center open," Knop said in an email. "I feel it is a huge loss for Cannon Beach. I hope to be able to open a center again in Cannon Beach when possible. I would like to thank the city and our many businesses and individuals who supported the center throughout the years."

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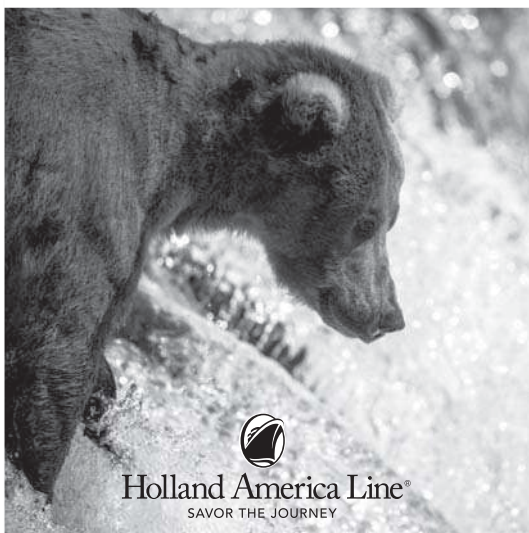
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