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So Little Can Do So Much!

PRESCHOOL *from page 1A*

One of the loftiest goals of the preschool, which has plans to open in the fall of 2019, is to offer free tuition.

“We want anyone to be able to come and we do not want cost to be a factor in a student attending preschool,” O'Mara said. “But filling out the daunting forms to see if it will be free is sometimes too much. The paperwork can be overwhelming. And so we don't want there to be barriers like that. We want parents to be able to access it.”

The plan is to have preschoolers attend the entire day.

“It would mirror the school day, starting at 8:30 a.m. and ending at 3:30 p.m.,” O'Mara said. “Parents can choose a full day Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or a full day Monday-Wednesday, or Tuesday-Thursday.”

O'Mara recognizes that a full day can be long for 3-year olds, “but the routine of a full day, and the structure of a full day, is important,” she said. “For us with only 20 students, offering half a day would be hard to balance, with 16 kids in the morning and 5 kids in the afternoon. It's just really hard to figure out who is where when. So that's what we're looking at now, but it's not set in stone.”

As to what the children will be learning during the day, the plan is not set — the preschool is still searching for a certified, licensed preschool teacher.

But O'Mara was able to give a general overview of what the children will experience.

“Our goal is to have to kids who go from preschool to kindergarten be ‘school ready,’” she said. “So, they have the social emotional skills of playing with a partner, sharing their toys, learning how to line up. The empathy and sympathy piece, as well as how to engage in a conversation. ... But we also recognize there needs to be some solid educational letters, sounds, expectations for when they come into kindergarten. That's something we're still developing. But we're seeing it as a combination of developmentally appropriate practices with expectations of what education is happening and exploring play as well. You can learn a lot from playing, and that's an important component.”

Getting students “school ready” for kindergarten could potentially end up saving time and money for the Mapleton School District as a whole.

“We're hoping to see fewer struggling learners, which we're spending resources to get caught up,” O'Mara said. These include extra in-class time dealing with behavioral and educational issues. “We are currently a Title 1 school. We receive federal dollars to help support struggling learners.”

But if the students enter elementary with a base level of skills, it's possible that the Title 1 funds could be diverted to other areas, such as supporting the preschool.

“If a kiddo is struggling, the earlier you can address that, than the more likely you are to get them caught up. It opens a whole new avenue for our kids to be successful and close the gap. We're just leveling the

playing field, to get them ready to hit the ground running,” O'Mara said. “That's ultimately our goal.”

By having the preschool located on school district property, integrating the children into school life will also be easier.

“They will have access to the gym, playground, food service, the cafeteria. Whether they eat lunch every day with the elementary kiddos, or once a week. We recognize that they're 3 and 4-year-olds. Sometimes having a 3-year-old in an assembly with a fifth-grader may not be appropriate. We'll just have to see.”

O'Mara has been working on the program for months now, after local parent Kelsie Allen approached the school board with the idea. Allen, along with O'Mara, Mapleton School District board member Mizu Burruss and Siuslaw Vision Keepers Susy Lacer and Stephanie Sarles, began to work on a basic plan for getting the preschool off the ground.

“I will tell you we're learning the processes to open a preschool, and to do it right, takes time and money,” O'Mara said.

Much of the cost will be covered through in-kind donations from the school district, including transportation, custodial and insurance.

The organizers project a cost of \$217,289 annually. The group has already received a grant of \$100,000 from United Way of Lane County, with \$50,000 doled out over the first two years. They also received a \$6,000 grant from the Western Lane Community Foundation, “which is a lot for them,” O'Mara said.

Those grants would take care of setting up the program. For operational costs, such as teacher salary, O'Mara is hoping to receive two pending grants from the Oregon Community Foundation, the Mapleton Community Foundation and the Ford Family Foundation. If those grants do not come through, O'Mara insists the goal of free tuition will remain intact, and they will simply move the opening date a little further until they can apply for other grants.

But right now, O'Mara is focusing on solidifying what the program will offer.

“What are the offerings? Is it a full day, half a day? Those kinds of things,” O'Mara said. “Just helping us fine tune the business plan.”

A Preschool Advisory Committee, which includes a group of parents from the community, has just held its first meeting to help answer those questions. The committee meets the second and fourth Tuesday of every month at 10 a.m. at the Mapleton School District office. O'Mara encouraged anyone interested in attending the meeting to contact the district at 541-268-4471.

She also encouraged community members to fill out an online survey, which can be found at the district's website, mapleton.k12.or.us.

“If there are preschool families that haven't filled it out, either online or on paper, we would love to have it,” O'Mara said.

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Siuslaw News garage sale GUIDE

Linda's Thrift Store 37th & Hwy. 101 is going to shut her doors. Yes, going out of business. Come check out the inventory! 75% off everything in store! All metal retail shelves for sale (great for shop or garage) & plastic 4-tier shelves. Open 10am-4pm

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8am-4pm
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**Fri./Sat., 4/19-4/20
9am-4pm**

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