



School Zone



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A monthly newsletter covering Cottage Grove-area schools

Grant to fund KITS program for kindergarten readiness

BY JON STINNETT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

A new program utilizing federal grant funds aims to help the area's incoming kindergarteners prepare for school even before the first bell rings this fall.

Jackie Lester, who began a new position as South Lane School District's P-20 Coordinator this school year, said that the District will receive about a \$210,000 share in grant funds for the Kids in Transition to School, or KITS, program in Lane County. Lester said the program, which will gather new students in two classrooms each at Bohemia and Harrison Elementary schools for two days a week over the summer, will help acquaint kids with the academic, social and emotional changes they will encounter when they start school this fall. The program is open to all area students starting kindergarten in the fall of 2016, and on Wednesday, Feb. 10, schools welcomed incoming kindergarteners to tour classrooms and meet their prospective teachers in addition to signing up some students for KITS.

KITS will bring new kindergarteners to school twice a week for two hours.

"In addition to the academic areas we'll be covering, the program also teaches practical

skills and teaches the routines kids will encounter in schools — they'll learn how to work in table groups, how to make transitions and work with different kids and different adults. This should be especially helpful for kids who don't have prior experience with a preschool," Lester said.

"The District has a need for this added preparedness across all boundaries," Lester said. "We have a high number of kids in foster care, kids being cared for primarily by their grandparents and kids facing other obstacles. We're hoping to reach families wherever they are with this program."

South Lane worked with the Oregon Social Learning Center to pilot the KITS program in a classroom at Bohemia last summer, and the grant funding will allow the program to expand into three more classrooms. Local teaching and classified staff will be trained to administer the program, Lester said.

"We're inviting other organizations with early learning staff such as Head Start and the Family Relief Nursery to apply to administer this curriculum," she said. "This should give us an opportunity to learn the material together, and the more we can learn together, the better we're going to be at collaboration."

In fact, Lester has stated that creating stronger relationships



photo by Jon Stinnett

Harrison kindergarten teacher Stephanie Black shows incoming kindergartener Annabelle Stinnett a banner that Black's students made to welcome new students.

between South Lane School District and the organizations that provide preschool care and education has been a major goal of her new P-20 position, which is designed in part to integrate kids' school careers with the education and care they receive before entering school and after they graduate. Lester will oversee the KITS program in South Lane, though she said South Lane is linked with eight other schools in a consortium through the Lane Education Services District. The grant funding is only available through education foundations and cannot be distributed directly to school districts, and the ESD agreed to serve as the fiscal agent for eight area districts including South Lane that do not have their own education foundation.

"It's an exciting project, and Lane ESD has been a fantastic partner," she said.

About 40 area families attended the Feb. 10 pre-registration event, and Lester said the District expects between 165-200 new kindergarteners next year. Another event to register new kindergarteners will be held in April, and in the meantime, Lester said the District wants to hear from families with kids about to enter school.

"If we don't know about them, we want to," she said. "Every year, there are families that don't register their kids until about the first part of October, and they're typically our highest-needs kids. We need to figure out ways to attract them and check in."

Homework help: Creating a helpful homework atmosphere

Classrooms conducive to learning may go a long way toward helping students understand the subjects they study in school, but the environment kids encounter at home also plays a big role in how well kids do in their studies. A homework-friendly atmosphere at home can facilitate learning, and there are many ways parents can create such an environment for their school-aged children.

Keep the homework room clean. A cluttered homework room may be less appealing to children, and such disorganization also can distract kids from the tasks at hand. Encourage kids to keep their homework rooms clean, and help them clean up if need be. Supplies and other items kids need should be easily accessible in the homework room so kids are not wasting time looking for items they need to complete their homework.

Designate a homework zone in a distraction-free area of your home. Some youngsters are easily distracted, and those distractions come in many forms. A living room where the television is blaring, a noisy kitchen where dinner is being prepared and a room where pets can roam free are not ideal homework areas, as each can take kids' attention away from their assignments. Designate a room in your home that is quiet and well lit so kids can do their homework free from distraction.

Choose the right location for the homework room. When choosing an area of your home where kids will do their homework, avoid rooms adjacent to the kitchen and living room, as these rooms tend to be popular and subject to heavy foot traffic. But don't choose a room that's too far away from the hustle and bustle, such as the basement, as that may make kids feel as though they are being punished. In addition, you want to be able to periodically check in on kids to see if they need help and make sure they aren't spending their homework time surfing the Internet or procrastinating.

Let kids rest or relax before starting their homework. Another element of a good homework atmosphere is letting kids unwind between getting home from school and cracking open the books. A break between school and homework time can help kids focus better on their studies. In the interim between arriving home from school and starting on their homework, give kids a healthy snack that can provide an extra jolt of energy they can use once they start their homework.

Evaluate how the homework zone is working. Once an ample amount of time has passed, examine how kids are performing on their homework assignments. If they are doing well, then there is no reason to break up the current routine. If they are struggling, ask them if there is anything about the current setup they dislike and address those issues accordingly.

Kids rarely look forward to doing their homework. But the right atmosphere can make homework seem like less of a chore and more of an opportunity for kids to apply themselves.

Partnerships aid learning at Latham

As a small school, staff and students at Latham School say they're always looking for ways to support one another as a community of learners:



Several times a week, Ms. Bower's fourth-grade students go into Mrs. Prichard's third-grade classroom to help the students learn their multiplication facts through song.



Ms. Bower's fourth-grade students pair up with Mrs. Pabst's kindergarteners once a week to participate in PE activities.



To help first-grade students in Mrs. Chapman's room practice their reading skills, Mr. Bower's fifth-grade students read with them twice a month.



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