

\$1M-plus going to pre-K programs

By: **JOAN HELLYER** (Tue, Aug/14/2007)

Dozens of preschool students in Bucks County will have a chance, thanks to more than \$1 million in state grant money, to get a jumpstart on their education.

The grants awarded to local entities are part of the \$75 million Gov. Ed Rendell and the state legislature allotted to the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program for the 2007-2008 school year.

The program is designed to help 11,000 3- and 4-year-old children across the state who are in greatest need of academic support, state officials said.

Locally, the United Way of Bucks County, and the Bristol Township, Morrisville and Neshaminy school districts were selected to utilize the pre-K grants.

They are among the 150 entities from around Pennsylvania that the state education department identified Friday that will receive pre-K grants for "new, quality pre-kindergarten programs."

The pre-K classes help the kids get ready and motivated for school, advocates said. In addition, research suggests that every dollar spent on a child's pre-K education saves \$17 on social services that would be needed later for people who do not succeed in school, they said.

Priority enrollment for the pre-K program will be for children who have economic, language, cultural or other disadvantages that leaves them at a higher risk of failing in the classroom, state officials said.

Locally, the grant money will be used in different ways.

The United Way will divide the \$316,000 it was awarded between a consortium of eight childcare centers, said Sharon Barker, senior vice president of community development.

The centers are: Sonshine Preschool in Bensalem; Fairy Tales, Inc. in Penndel; Jolly Toddler in Upper Southampton; Rainbow Academy for Little Scholars in Ivyland; Elbow Lane in Warrington; Tabor Children's House in Doylestown; Life Span in Quakertown;

and, the YMCA of Upper Bucks County, she said.

Bristol Township will use its \$517,200 to establish two half-day pre-K classes at Harry S Truman High School, where high school students taking early education classes will assist in teaching the younger students, district officials said.

Neshaminy will partner with the Oxford Valley Learning Center to serve 20 preschool students with its estimated \$125,000, district spokeswoman Sandra Costanzo said. Details of the program are still being worked out, she said.

The Courier Times was unsuccessful in reaching Morrisville representatives for comment about the estimated \$280,000 awarded to their school system, despite a call and e-mail to the supervisor of the district's Pre-K program.

Barker said the local entities will get together to compare and coordinate their efforts. They're making it a goal to increase the number of participants next year, she said.

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