

Grants mean early education for more preschoolers

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York Dispatch

[Article Last Updated:](#)

More local pre-school children will get a chance to begin their education early as a result of a state funding program.

"Now they'll be on a level playing field with other children whose parents can afford to sign them up for pre-school," said Sarah Bosley, director of the YWCA's Learning Center. "They can start learning now instead of waiting to get to kindergarten."

Bosley said the learning center received a \$235,000 grant from the state's new "Pre-K Counts" early childhood initiative program designed to fund free pre-school programs for 3- and 4-year-olds whose parents sign them up for the classes.

She said the money will help the learning center start full-day and part-day classes, with 20 pre-school students in each class. The center -- located at 320 E. Market St. in York City -- also is hiring two teachers and two aides for the classes.

The tentative start date is Oct. 1, Bosley said.

Pre-K Counts requires grantees to provide a qualified teacher and teacher's aide for each class and use a curriculum that meets the state early learning standards. The children's progress will be assessed, and the state receives a report of each grantee's performance.

Gov. Ed Rendell has said the program will provide funding for more than 11,000 children statewide.

Part of statewide initiative: The state program was approved as part of the state's education budget and is a \$75 million initiative to reach "at-risk" children -- those in jeopardy of academic failure due to poverty, special-education needs or a language barrier -- before they enter the traditional school program.

The York City School District is receiving more than \$900,000 to start pre-school programs at its elementary schools. But five other York County agencies are also getting a part of the \$75 million.

Carol Heagy, Early Learning Center director at Crispus Attucks Community Center, said the organization will use its \$78,000 Pre-K Counts fund to help 20 children learn the social, reading, math, science and motor skills that will prepare them for kindergarten.

The half-day classes -- which will be led by a teacher and an assistant -- will begin sometime in September, she said.

The center, which has 200 children in its waiting list, currently serves about 120 children from ages 3 to 12.

York Day Nursery, at 450 E. Philadelphia St. in the city, also received \$78,000 in Pre-K Counts funds, which will be used to provide half-day educational instruction for 20 children, said executive director, Catherine Repman.

The nursery will have room for some of the 105 students who are on its waiting list, she said.

"And we hope to recruit new students that may not have access to quality early childhood education," she added. "It's a part of our mission ... to help students who are described as at-risk for school."

York Jewish Community Center in York Township and Kinder-Care Learning Center in Springettsbury Township also received grants.

The Pre-K grants are good for one year, but grant recipients can apply for continuations to provide the program in the future.

About Pre-K Counts

The state's "Pre-K Counts" early childhood initiative program includes funding for:

--- Crispus Attucks Association Inc., 605 S. Duke St., York, which received \$78,000

--- York City School District, \$925,000

--- York Day Nursery Inc., 450 E. Philadelphia St., \$78,000

--- York YWCA, 320 E. Market St., \$235,000

--- Kinder-Care Learning Center, 120 Northern Way, Springettsbury Township, award amount has not been confirmed

--- York Jewish Community Center, 2000 Hollywood Drive, York Township, award amount unconfirmed

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