

Recruitment begins for preschool program

By: **JOAN HELLYER** and **ALEEA SLAPPY** (Thu, Aug/16/2007)

Pre-K Counts helps children develop the social and academic skills they need to succeed in school. Some classes are expected to start in October.

Recruitment is under way at schools and childcare centers in Lower Bucks that have been awarded grant money in the Pre-K Counts initiative.

The effort is designed to help 11,000 3 and 4-year-old Pennsylvania kids who need academic support get a jump on their education, state officials said.

The state announced last week that it was awarding \$75 million to the Pre-K Counts program to fund preschool classes during the 2007-08 school year in schools and daycare centers.

Grants totaling more than \$1 million have been awarded to the United Way of Bucks County, and the Bristol Township, Morrisville and Neshaminy school districts to fund preschool classes for qualifying children.

Morrisville, which received a \$241,000 grant, will operate two half-day classes at the YMCA in the borough and the district's M.R. Reiter Elementary School, officials said. The YMCA will house the program for 3-year-olds. The program for 4-year-olds will be located at M.R. Reiter.

Pre-kindergarten can provide students with social, emotional and academic development they may not receive at home, said Kate Taylor, principal at Morrisville's Grandview Elementary School. This development is necessary for children to succeed in kindergarten, she said.

"If they don't have a solid foundation by kindergarten, each year, as they get exposed to more work, they get further behind," Taylor said. "A pre-K program is important in Morrisville because there are many single parents and many working parents who can't afford to pay for pre-K."

The pre-K program is closely connected to the kindergarten program at M.R. Reiter, said Kimberly Kane, the YMCA community events director. Morrisville's pre-kindergarten

classes will use the Creative Curriculum for a guide, she said. It is designed for children up to age 5.

Bristol Township school district will split \$517,200 in state grant money between an in-house preschool program and pre-K classes at local daycare centers.

The in-house, half-day classes for 36 students will be held at Harry S Truman High School, where the district has established a preschool program to help high school students learn the ins and outs of early childhood care.

District representatives are contacting families on the waiting list of the federally funded preschool program at Maple Shade Elementary School to see if they want to take part in the Truman initiative, district spokeswoman Eileen Kelliher said. Classes are expected to start in October, she said.

Bristol Township's grant also will fund classes in 2007-08 at A Child's World in Middletown, the Radcliffe Learning Center and the Pennco Institute in Bristol, Kelliher said. The centers will provide 48 full-day slots for district preschool children, she said.

Neshaminy, which received a \$79,000 Pre-K Counts grant, is working out the details of its initiative with the Oxford Valley Learning Center to serve 20 preschool students, spokeswoman Sandra Costanzo said.

The United Way was awarded \$316,000 to help eight childcare centers in the county implement the pre-K classes as part of its "Success by Six" initiative, said Sharon Barker, senior vice president of community development.

The centers include: the Sunshine Preschool in Bensalem; Fairy Tales Inc. in Penndel; the Jolly Toddler in Upper Southampton; the Rainbow Academy for Little Scholars in Ivyland and four childcare centers in Middle Bucks and Upper Bucks.

As with the school districts' initiatives, class instruction will center on research-based curriculum and the students' progress will be charted throughout the class, Barker said.

The pre-K classes will have priority enrollment for children with economic, cultural, language or other disadvantages, state officials said.

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WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Childcare centers participating in the Pre-K Counts initiative might be able to provide additional morning or afternoon care for the preschool students for a few, center

representatives said. Contact your child's center for more information.

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