

Dayton Daily News

State pours millions into preschool instruction

Dayton, Springfield get money to help prepare students for kindergarten

By [Jeremy P. Kelley](#) - Staff Writer

October 13, 2015 - In many area school districts, half and even three-quarters of the students are not truly ready for kindergarten when they reach age five.

Not only do they struggle early, but research shows some never catch up. Educators say quality preschool programs are a big help, but access is a problem in poor neighborhoods.



JIM WITMER

Head start pre-school students arrive at Rosa Parks Early learning Center for the p.m. session on Tuesday. Preschool providers in Dayton are getting a half-million dollar boost this month, opening doors to 135 more disadvantaged students, in an attempt to get children prepared for kindergarten by age 5.

New money from the state is designed to open some of those doors. Preschool providers in Dayton will get a half-million-dollar boost this month that will help 135 disadvantaged students get better prepared for kindergarten by age 5.

The money is part of \$15 million in additional early childhood education funding from this summer's state budget bill, and will benefit 3,675 students in 55 school districts statewide. In addition to Dayton, funding has been approved for preschool providers in the Fairborn, Tecumseh, Springfield, and Tri-Village areas.

Research shows students who test as “ready for kindergarten” when they start school have higher success rates later in their academic careers.



JIM WITMER

Head start pre-school teacher Lakeisha Lynn leads a greeting circle for students arriving for the p.m. session at Rosa Parks Early learning Center on Tuesday. Preschool providers in Dayton are getting a half-million dollar boost this month, opening doors to 135 more disadvantaged students, in an attempt to get children prepared for kindergarten by age 5.

“We know from local data that for our kids who score in the highest band on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, 96 percent of them read proficiently (once they reach) third grade,” said Robyn Lightcap, director of Montgomery County’s ReadySetSoar early childhood education effort. “There are studies across the nation that point to a correlation between students who are better prepared for kindergarten doing better later on.”

Dayton Public Schools is receiving \$300,000 to create 75 immediate, new openings within its public preschool programs, which are a partnership with the Miami Valley Child Development Centers (MVCDC), according to Karen Lombard, DPS director of preschool thru second grade.

In addition, four separate preschool providers in Dayton will receive a combined \$240,000 to create 60 more slots.

- [Kindergarten readiness numbers flat locally](#)
- [Schools move to earlier kindergarten cutoff date](#)
- [Educators call early learning key to success](#)

'Extra step up'

All of the agencies receiving funding are high-quality providers according to the state, and have been licensed by the state Department of Education or Department of Job and Family Services.

"Instead of those children being at a center that just has a grandma or grandpa babysitting — which is good sometimes — they can get into a high-quality preschool program, possibly for two years," Lombard said. "It gives them that extra step up before they come to Dayton Public."

Lightcap said high-quality preschools provide curriculum that is based on state standards and better-educated teachers who get continuing training. Children are eligible for these programs if they are 3 or 4 years old and come from a family with income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (\$48,500 for a family of four).

Ohio Department of Education officials said three providers in Fairborn will get a combined \$148,000 from the state for this year, opening up 37 extra preschool seats there. Three providers in Springfield will get \$652,000 for 163 new spots, almost half of them at Springfield City Schools. Tri-Village Schools in Darke County will get \$20,000 for five extra spots, and MVCDC will get \$52,000 for 13 spots in Medway, in the Tecumseh Schools area.

Lightcap said the funding is renewable in future years as long as providers fill their funded slots. The state used a formula measuring poverty rates plus kindergarten and third-grade scores to determine areas with need.

Low readiness levels

Montgomery County data from Learn to Earn Dayton shows kindergarten readiness levels were as low as 21 to 24 percent in Dayton, Northridge, Trotwood-Madison and Jefferson Twp. in 2013-14. A cluster of large suburban districts — Huber Heights, Miamisburg, Vandalia-Butler, Northmont and Kettering — were between 42 and 46 percent readiness, while Valley View (53 percent), Centerville (60 percent) and Oakwood (74 percent) were at the top.

Even after an area was identified by the state formula, preschools in those areas had to decide whether to apply for the money, based in part on whether they could fill the additional spots.

Lightcap said she thinks preschools will be able to fill their spots, but it will be challenging and might take a few months, since they just found out about the opportunity in October, when families are already into a school-year routine. Lightcap said next year's funding announcement will come much earlier.

Lombard said DPS' 75 new openings are in addition to 192 existing public preschool spots, most of which are filled. Counting outside providers, she said 642 preschoolers are being served in some fashion within DPS' attendance area.

Lombard said the district will publicize the new opportunities, suggesting families call MVCDC at 226-5664. She said that transportation is an issue for some families.

"I think people want (preschool); it's a matter of can they get to it?" Lombard said.

Bipartisan issue

More funding will be available next year, and state officials are placing an increasing priority on preschool.

“You see governors and Congress members, and certainly the president is supporting early childhood as well,” Lightcap said. “It’s really a bipartisan issue, and people understand that if you invest at the beginning, you get better results later on.”

Preschool grant recipients

Dayton: Dayton Public Schools (75 new openings), Dayton Christian Center (20), Miami Valley Family Care Center (15), St. Benedict the Moor (15), Childrens Laboratory School (10)

Fairborn: Fairborn City Schools (15), Creative World of Learning (12), Mini University (10)

Springfield: Springfield City Schools (83), Miami Valley Child Development Centers (40), Springfield Christian School (40)

Medway: Miami Valley Child Development Centers (13)

New Madison: Tri-Village Local Schools (5)