

Garrett County providers secure state funding for pre-K expansion

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OAKLAND — Garrett County providers will receive \$442,000 in grants as part of Maryland's Prekindergarten Expansion Act of 2014.

The Garrett County Community Action Committee Inc. received \$112,000 to open up an additional or new pre-K in the southern end of the county and \$330,000 to add two elementary schools, Grantsville and Friendsville, to the Judy Center (Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Family Education Centers system), according to Duane Yoder, president of Community Action.

"This is the first time that Community Action has opened up pre-K schools. Generally, they are operated by the Garrett County Board of Education," said Yoder. "All pre-K classrooms in the county have been successful in school readiness in terms of the students that come out of it."

The Judy Center Partnership is part of a statewide effort to promote school readiness and is operated by Community Action in partnership with the board. Friendsville and Yough Glades elementary schools have already been added to the Judy Center, according to Yoder.

The services provided in the Judy Center classrooms and programs are designed to support young children's physical, personal and social, language and literacy, scientific, thinking social studies, mathematical thinking and the arts while supporting families in their abilities to support their children's early learning.

Under the expansion, the state is partnering with local providers and schools systems across the state to expand high-quality, full- and half day pre-K to another 1,563 children.

"Every child in Maryland deserves to be able to climb

the ladder of opportunity towards success, and expanding access to quality early childhood education is a critical part of our effort to close the achievement gap throughout our state," said Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown. "With this \$4.3 million investment, we're ensuring that another 1,560 of our children will have access to a high-quality pre-K program this year. By working together with educators, advocates, parents and members of our communities, we're one step closer to making high quality, voluntary pre-K available to each and every one of Maryland's children."

The \$4.3 million in grants will be distributed to recipients statewide.

The Pre-K Expansion Act builds on the state's existing pre-K system and expands the number of pre-K slots available to include Maryland children whose families make up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

"This Prekindergarten Expansion Grant builds upon the existing public prekindergarten system and moves us even closer to the target goal of providing universal access to high-quality prekindergarten for Maryland children of all income levels," said Lillian Lowery, state superintendent of schools.

The bill represents the first step toward expanding pre-K to all Maryland children by establishing a competitive Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Grant Program and Fund through which local school systems and local providers were able to apply to establish, expand and enhance existing pre-K programs and highly effective Judy Centers. Recipients were selected by the Maryland State Department of Education following the application process which began in April.

"Everybody is a winner with a bill like this," said Margaret Williams, executive director of the Maryland Family Network, "because high-quality child care and public pre-K together prevent long-term problems that cost us all even more money."

Research demonstrates that access to pre-K helps close the achievement gap. Children who attend a high quality pre-K program have

greater employment and higher wages as adults, according to the Maryland Family Network. This combined with other benefits such as reduced crime and more stable families will make Maryland a safer and more thriving place to live, work and raise families.