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Poplar Bluff Schools Awarded \$250k Preschool Grant

AUGUST 06TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - A \$250,000 grant has been awarded to Poplar Bluff Schools to add a preschool program that will further help serve the needs of the community in getting district children school-ready.

The funding through the Missouri Preschool Program will allow the Early Childhood Center to enroll 60 students ages 3-5, and employ six staff members to manage three classrooms. Pending licensing by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, the plan is for the preschool to be operational by Monday, Sept 21.

Enrollment will take place on a first come, first serve basis. Cost of tuition will be set on a sliding scale based on the income levels used for the free and reduced lunch program.

“Studies have shown over the years that when students enter kindergarten, there is a marked difference in skill levels from students who have or have not participated in preschool education,” said JoAnne Westbrook, Early Childhood Center director.

“Currently our highly qualified staff at Early Childhood is only able to serve a fourth of our kids entering the Kindergarten Center.”

Westbrook, who wrote the grant, has been employed by the R-I school district since 2005. For the needs assessment component of the proposal, she solicited AmeriCorps Director Becky Winters to enlist an advisory committee consisting of parents, educators, child care

providers, civic leaders, officials from the social services sector and members of the faith-based community.

“When students do not receive that jumpstart on their academic careers at an early age, they’re more likely to wind up in remedial programs in the upper grades,” Winters stated. “In recent years, the community has lost multiple child care facilities for different reasons, and our committee wants to help fill that void.”

According to their research, 568 district children are not receiving a preschool education. The area child care facilities available are presently serving 610 children with only 36 openings. Of those children, the Early Children Center is at capacity with 250 students registered in two half-day sessions based on family needs determined by the federal Title I and Early Childhood Special Education programs.

R-I was among 20 schools the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education announced would be awarded the five-year MPP grant on July 13. The money will go toward start-up costs with the goal of self-sustainability upon conclusion. By year four, the preschools will be accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

A waiting list is currently being compiled at the Early Childhood Center located at 1235 N. Main St. For consideration, a child must be 3 years of age but not older than 5 as of July 31. For more information, call 573-785-6803.

(From left) Jacob Woodruff, Ja’Meir Hood-Daniels and Logan Keown of the Poplar Bluff Early Childhood Center pose in their dream job attire during Career Day this past May.

***Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Coordinator
Poplar Bluff R-I School District***

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