

Jumping into kindergarten

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 05 August 2010 13:40 -



New preschool program teaches skills, more.

It's icky," exclaimed Alexandra Goad as she smeared shaving cream on the table.

Watching classmates swirl the letters of their names in foam, the Gothenburg Public Schools preschooler soon changed her mind.

"I like this," Alexandra declared, putting her finger in the lather to create an "A."

Welcome to the first-ever preschool offered by Gothenburg Public Schools.

School officials say Jump Start gives 4- and 5-year-olds a "jump start" into kindergarten.

The program, which youngsters attend for three hours, five days a week, started July 19 and will end Friday.

Jump Start teacher Michelle Stienike said it's been great getting 33 kids into a school routine.

"We've seen the kids grow so much in the last couple of weeks," Stienike said. "Socially, they're more comfortable with each other and language-wise they're expressing themselves more."

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Through activities such as writing names, working with shapes, colors, letters and numbers and learning social skills such as how to walk quietly in the hall, she said students are getting ready for kindergarten.

All of Jump Start's enrollees will begin kindergarten on Aug. 17.

"We're trying to close the gap so everyone is on the same playing field," said Stienike who also teaches first grade.

Snack time is "family style" so youngsters learn to serve and pass food and converse while a daily puppet show teaches them social skills like how to share.

Kelsey Holmes, one of the program's five para educators, said Jump Start has several benefits.

"By having 33 students who know how to get into a formal line, they can be role models for other kindergartners," Holmes said.

She said the program also provides learning opportunities for her and the other college-aged para educators.

Holmes is studying to be a nurse, Hilary Messersmith plans to go into occupational therapy and Heather Teahon will become a teacher.

"It gives us a jump start too," Holmes said.

Jamie Burkink and Sheila Ahlenstorf are also para educators.

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Dudley Elementary principal and special education co-director Teresa Messersmith spearheaded the development of the program.

Along with special education teacher Erica Johnson and Stienike, the three developed a curriculum to match the district's philosophy of what preschool kids would need.

Twice, district officials have applied unsuccessfully for a state grant to help fund public preschool and they plan to do it again.

Messersmith said the school board will consider

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