

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Programs for kids in need get \$2.5 million windfall

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After-school and early-childhood-education programs got a boost yesterday as Franklin County commissioners passed along about \$2.5 million they hadn't expected to receive.

The money, left over in the state's account for the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, helps restore some cuts in programming this year, county Administrator Don Brown said. It had to be spent on social services and it had to be allocated by Sept. 30.

Ten after-school programs will share more than \$1.1 million in addition to the \$1.2 million the county had allocated to them earlier in the year. Two early-learning programs — Start Smart and Columbus Kids: Ready, Set, Learn — got a big boost: an additional \$1.3 million on top of their original \$200,000 grant from the county.

Commissioners also approved spending \$23,000 of the federal money to help buy school supplies.

Janet E. Jackson, executive director of the United Way of Central Ohio, said the early-learning money will help train teachers, develop curriculum and provide playground equipment for thousands of children from 2 1/2 to 4 years old who attend day-care centers or stay with in-home care providers in three neighborhoods.

"People are really beginning to understand that you can't wait until the child is 5," she said.

The United Way is overseeing funding for both programs. The focus is currently on the Weinland Park and Linden neighborhoods of Columbus, Jackson said, though it will expand to the South Side this fall. She's looking for more government and corporate funding to expand the services to 12,000 young children throughout the area covered by the Columbus City Schools in 2013.

"The commissioners have been wholly supportive of early-childhood education," she said.

Commissioner Marilyn Brown noted a PEW Charitable Trusts study that showed that poor children exposed to early-education programs had more economic success than those who were not.

Commissioner Paula Brooks asked whether the programs would eventually reach into South-Western schools. Jackson said both programs are now centered in Columbus and that the Columbus Kids program is partially funded by donations from the Columbus City Schools Education Foundation. But she said Start Smart is considering moving into another district.

The additional money helps but doesn't come close to making up for cuts over the past several years, said Don Brown. In 2007, he said, the county's Department of Job and Family Services received \$28 million from the program for needy families. This year, with the additional \$2.5 million, the federal funding totaled \$11 million.

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