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## UPDATE: UMPOUA COMMUNITY COLLEGE



The Southern Oregon Head Start headquarters in Medford. Buffy Pollock / Rogue Valley Times

*Money for more than 900 preschoolers and hundreds of Head Start employees in Jackson and Josephine counties to be received by Friday*

Southern Oregon Head Start, regional lawmakers and community advocates breathed a collective sigh of relief Wednesday at the announcement that funding for more than 900 preschoolers and several hundred Head Start employees in Jackson and Josephine counties had been restored after concerns the program could lose half — or even all — of its funding.

Rumors of the feared cuts came early this week on the heels of a decision by the Trump administration last week to shutter five of 12 regional Head Start offices around the U.S., which provide early learning services to some 800,000 children. The closures affected the Seattle regional office, which serves Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska.

Katherine Clayton, executive director of Southern Oregon Head Start, announced Wednesday afternoon via email that the agency had received notice that funding would be received by Friday and that no employee layoffs would occur.

Amber Lease, the organization's Human Resources director, confirmed the news Wednesday, stating, "As of 11 a.m. today, we received our Notice of Award that we would be receiving the second half of our funding and we were very relieved."

"We are extremely grateful for the community support and outreach everyone has done and the advocacy we have seen through the community. Our staff and our families are so grateful for that and we wouldn't be able to do the work we are doing without them," Lease said.

She declined to release specific planned cuts but said a loss of full funding would have, at a minimum, impacted "close to 50% of our program."

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., said that the region's Head Start program was "finally receiving the federal grant money it was owed is welcome news for the hundreds of families it serves and its dedicated employees."

"The combination of the pressure from my office and the public outcry from the Southern Oregon community forced the federal government to release these funds, and I'm glad for this happy outcome, but to be clear: our local Head Starts should not be faced with this issue in the first place," Merkley said in a statement to the Rogue Valley Times.

"I will keep pushing to restore staff fired from Head Start regional offices, including those in Seattle, who are vital sources of support for Head Starts in Oregon. And I will keep working to cut through the chaos and confusion the Trump Administration is sowing in critical programs Oregon families rely on," the senator said.

René Brandon, director for the Southern Oregon Early Learning Services (SOELS) Hub, said the potential loss of services for over 900 children was devastating to consider. Head Start, she noted, "was a 1960s anti-poverty initiative."

“The idea that, at this crossroads in America right now, that we could potentially lose Head Start services is devastating and definitely going in the wrong direction,” Brandon said, noting that prior to Wednesday’s announcement, community members and various organizations had come together to identify resources for potentially impacted families.

She expressed “huge relief” at Wednesday’s news but also frustration.

“It’s important to emphasize how damaging this lack of federal communication has been for Southern Oregon Head Start leadership, families and staff. We need to expect, demand, better,” Brandon told the Times.

“This is an example of how fragile our early learning system is when there is so much chaos and instability at the federal level.”

State Rep. Pam Marsh, D-Ashland, said the possibility of closure had come with its own ill effects.

“I’m immensely relieved that the doors won’t close tomorrow,” she said, “but even the threat of closure was immediately destabilizing for staff and families.”

Sunny Spicer, executive director of the Oregon Center for Creative Learning, said some 80% of children in the region require “some level of financial subsidy” and that 55% require full subsidies.

“Our region already suffers from a significant shortage of early learning opportunities; 75% of the children (age 0-5) in our community go without vital early educational opportunities,” she noted.

Felicity Elworthy, a retired Head Start employee and adjunct professor for Southern Oregon University and Rogue Community College early childhood programs, said community members, including organizers from the Four Way Community Foundation, had rallied in recent days to identify a possible “network of support for situations like the one this week.”

Advocates, she said, were finding preschools willing to take a few extra children, as well as assistance for employees who faced layoffs.

“It was an instantaneous response. We have all been working to alert our networks to this.... Especially considering it could happen again at any time, as we know,” she said Wednesday.

Elworthy said news of the cuts had been emotionally destabilizing for the region’s most vulnerable families.

“It makes people who are already vulnerable and stressed have to be exposed to much greater levels of vulnerability and stress,” she said, “and creates an erosion of trust in the organizations they work with to keep them safe and to keep them included in a community of belonging.”

Brandon said uncertainty from upper levels of government warranted a call to action with those who are able “to be a voice for our more vulnerable community members.”

Of recent cuts from the federal administration, Brandon noted, “These days it’s hard to tell what’s from The Onion and what’s from the New York Times.”

#### **Showing of film discussion early childhood learning**

Regional showings of “Make A Circle,” a film exploring the challenges of providing education and services to children and families, and addressing childcare desserts, is being hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in recognition of the Week of the Young Child (April 5-11).

The screenings include speakers and a Q-and-A session at the end.

- April 9, 6-8 p.m. — Grants Pass RCC Redwood Campus (Rogue Auditorium)
- April 10, 6-8 p.m. — Medford RCC Riverside Campus (Higher Ed. Center, Room 132)
- April 10, 6-8 p.m. — Illinois Valley Branch of the Josephine Community Library in Cave Junction.

A trailer of the film is available on [YouTube \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z61n16V2dL4\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z61n16V2dL4).

Reach reporter Buffy Pollock at 458-488-2029 or [buffy.pollock@rv-times.com](mailto:buffy.pollock@rv-times.com). Follow her on Twitter @orwritergal.

## **Top Doctor: If You Eat Eggs Every Day, This Is What Happens**

This Doctor Has Decided To Release A Short Video To The Public