

Preschool tuition relief available - Hawaii News - Honolulu

Star-Advertiser

StarAdvertiser.com

Preschool tuition relief available

Eligible families have until April 30 to file applications for the state aid program

By Nanea Kalani

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Mar 01, 2014



Lower-income families can begin applying Saturday for \$7.6 million worth of preschool tuition subsidies, with most of the funding targeted to help a set of children who will be too young to enter kindergarten next year.

An eligible family can receive up to \$710 a month for its child to attend a licensed preschool.

Applications for the state-run Preschool Open Doors program will be accepted until April 30 for the 2014-15 school year, and can be found at patchhawaii.org.

The average cost to attend an accredited preschool in Hawaii is \$803 a month. About 40 percent of 4-year-olds in the state attend preschool.

Last legislative session, lawmakers scaled down Gov. Neil Abercrombie's early education initiatives and converted a \$25 million school readiness proposal into a \$6 million expansion of Preschool Open Doors, a child care program already existing under the Department of Human Services.

The \$6 million added to the program's \$1.6 million base budget is intended to help ease the transition to a higher age requirement for kindergarten and the elimination of junior kindergarten at public schools. The change starts with the upcoming school year, when students will need to be 5 years old by July 31 to enroll in kindergarten.

The money will help pay for an extra year of preschool for about one-fifth of the estimated 5,100 children who will be affected — those who are from low-income families and considered at risk or underserved.

The cost for which a family is responsible is based on a sliding-fee scale, using a family's monthly gross income — which cannot exceed 85 percent of the state's median income — and the selected preschool's tuition rate.

If awarded subsidies, families can select any of the approximately 650 preschool programs licensed by the state.

In addition to tuition subsidies, the governor's Executive Office on Early Learning is requesting \$4.5 million

for the next fiscal year to establish pre-kindergarten classes on 30 public school campuses statewide that would serve about 640 low-income 4-year-olds. It wants an additional \$1 million to contract with so-called "family-child interaction learning" providers to serve an additional 400 children.

Copyright (c) Honolulu Star-Advertiser