

## Total Learning program gets \$1.2m boost

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A new state law will allocate \$1.2 million to Action for Bridgeport Community Development for each of the next two years to advance its Total Learning initiative, state officials have confirmed.

The money is built into the 2007-09 budget approved by the General Assembly in June, said Olayemi Onibokun, project manager for preschool and Head Start programs for the state Department of Education.

The idea behind the law, Onibokun said, is to strengthen the link between Head Start preschool programs and elementary school.

The budget provides another \$1 million in new money for all other Head Start programs in the state to share.

Barbara Westwater, chief of curriculum and instruction for the state, said she will meet this week with ABCD officials to go over the legislation.

Charles Tisdale, executive director of ABCD, did not return phone calls to comment on the funding.

During a teacher training session last Wednesday at the Courtyard Marriott, Tisdale would say only that he was "prayerful" about the funding.

"We're in the process of meeting with people," he said. "It's in place, but we're not ready to come out with that."

ABCD has been working with Bridgeport's public schools for the past year to bring the Total Learning program to the city.

Together they established a pilot program at Columbus School last year, infusing a kindergarten class of Head Start graduates with extra support and instruction. The class also had a longer school day, extra classroom aides and were taught with an instructional approach that infused art, music and movement into everything the students learned.

The class was visited by numerous state and federal officials including Gov. M. Jodi Rell and U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.

This year, as many as a dozen kindergarten teachers have tentatively volunteered to adapt the Total Learning method in their classrooms, said Henry Kelly, deputy superintendent for teaching and learning for Bridgeport schools.

Others say as many as 16 teachers could ultimately be involved.

Teachers on board so far are at Barnum, Batalla, Classical Studies, Columbus, Dunbar, Hall, Longfellow, Roosevelt and Waltersville schools.

Some volunteers attended a three-day workshop last week at the Courtyard Marriott in Shelton to learn the basics of the Total Learning approach. All school year long, the teachers will be trained twice a week in their classrooms.

The volunteer teachers include a mixture of new and veteran teachers.

Julie Vieira, a first-year teacher at Hall School, said the approach seems exciting, very hands-on and creative.

She said she was taught some of the same ways to integrate different learning styles in her education classes in college.

Mimi Gomez, a kindergarten teacher at Batalla embarking on her 50th year teaching, volunteered because she is looking for new approaches in the classroom.

"I'm a very old lady with a very young heart. I like magic, colors, puppets. I thought this was the best way for me to teach my students. It made a lot of sense," said Gomez, who will be 70 in January.

Norma Young, a teacher at Barnum School, said she volunteered because she felt kindergarten was not as much fun as she thought it could — or should — be.

"Plus, this is a way to infuse some higher level of learning into my lessons," she said.

During the workshops, the teachers ran through lessons they would use with their students, sometimes dancing with each other and describing what they see in paintings they might share with students.

"Everything we do has a learning sequence," Sue Snyder, president of the Norwalk-based company that trains the teachers in the Total Learning techniques.

In the fall, some of the teachers will be in charge of classrooms that adopt the full Total Learning experience, including extra staffing, parental support and an after-school component managed by the city's Lighthouse program.

Others will get the Total Learning instruction without the extra support. Both groups will be studied by evaluators from the Michael Cohen Group of New York.

In addition to the state money, ABCD also stands to receive \$300,000 in federal funds if a U.S. House of Representatives appropriations bill makes it through the Senate.

John Cardarelli, a spokesman for U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, R-4, said it is expected the funds will help further research on brain development and learning, and offer a reform model that will benefit the city, state and nation.