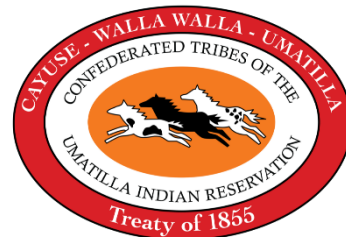


Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

PRESS RELEASE



46411 Timine Way
Pendleton, OR 97801
541-276-3165 • CTUIR.org

April 7, 2025

Contact: Travis Snell • 541.429.7394 • travissnell@ctuir.org

CTUIR Receives \$150,000 Grant for Literacy Proficiency

MISSION – The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) recently received a grant to help ensure children on the Umatilla Indian Reservation (UIR) become proficient readers as they enter school.

Zenaida Lyles, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) grants specialist, said DCFS received \$150,000 from the Meyer Memorial Trust – a private fund committed to racial, social and economic justice in Oregon – to develop and implement culturally-relevant and age-appropriate reading materials and methodologies for children.

“This project aims to involve very young children, youths, adults and elders to better prepare our very young children for school,” Lyles said. “Parents, family members, guardians, the youths and staff of child care centers will be provided training on how to engage young children in fun and enjoyable activities as they learn the alphabet, numerals, colors and shapes.”

Culturally- and age-appropriate materials that are already available will be procured, she said, and stories shared by tribal elders will be recorded as local artists provide illustrations for materials such as books and digitized products.

Lyles cited a 2024 article stating the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) showed only 43% of fourth graders in the United States scored at or above a proficient reading level with American Indian/Alaska Native students scoring 19% in 2019 and 18% in 2022.

“We look forward to generations of school-aged children who can navigate the education paths side by side with their mainstream peers,” Lyles said. “We address the spectrum of human growth and development from cradle to career and beyond. This project is for all community members. We value the teachings of our elders, and we work to perpetuate them and pass them on to our younger members.”

For the project, DCFS will collaborate with other departments, agencies and entities. For example, Lyles said DCFS would work with the InterMountain Education Service District's Early Learning Hub for training needs. She added that DCFS officials hope to start the project mid-April with the grant ending May 2026.

The project will implement four components. The first is training staff, youths, family, parents and guardians with each group receiving at least two sessions. The second component is procuring and developing the literacy materials. The third component is implementing techniques and methodologies developed from training followed by the final component – assessing the project.

Flyers about project participation will be distributed, and schedules will be posted on various social media platforms, including the Confederated Umatilla Journal and KCUW radio station.

Lyles said the project's administrative operations will be at the DCFS Family Engagement Program, but multiple sites would be used for training and implementation, including the CTUIR's Átaw Miyánašma Learning Center and Head Start. Trainings may also be held at the CTUIR Senior Center.

"CTUIR community members are welcome to participate and will be limited only by the allowable capacity of the gathering sites, Lyles said. "We look forward to having school children who find joy in reading and learning."

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is comprised of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla Tribes, and formed under the Treaty of 1855 at the Walla Walla Valley, 12 Stat. 945. In 1949, the Tribes adopted a constitutional form of government to protect, preserve and enhance the reserved treaty rights guaranteed under federal law.

###

Caption: Preschool educator Alana Bevis holds a book for Cay-Uma-Wa Head Start student Mayvis Manta in the (Wolf) Xálišmaami Tanawat classroom on April 4 at the Nixyáawii Education Center in Mission. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation recently earned a grant to help ensure children on the Umatilla Indian Reservation become proficient readers as they enter school. PHOTO COURTESY OF CAY-UMA-WA HEAD START