CEDAR GROVE PARENTS CONCERNED

Head Start Officials Eye Expansion Plan

BY TERRY POPE

Head Start officials were to meet with community leaders in Bolivia Tuesday night to discuss ways to expand services to Brunswick County's pre-school age children.

Richard Green, executive director of Four-County Community Services of Laurinburg, outlined for a group of about 30 parents at Cedar Grove Monday the Head Start program's goals for 1992-93. Four-County operates three Head Start programs in Brunswick County.

One site eyed for a possible center is the Piney Grove Community Building at Bolivia, the former Brunswick County Schools alternative education center.

The federal Head Start program, launched in 1965, provides children age 3 to school entry from low-income families with education and health care to help them break the cycle of poverty.

Some parents say they don't like the proposed changes.

Head Start plans to expand services from four days to five days a week at all sites.

In the process, however, it will reduce the number of children served at the Cedar Grove center by half.

Beginning in July, instead of 40 children receiving two days a week service, 20 children will receive five days a week service. It is an attempt to increase contact time with teachers and volunteers, said Green.

Some parents have criticized the move. They say a questionnaire asking parents if they would like five-day-a-week service at Cedar Grove did not mention that the number of children would be cut in half.

"We discussed that it should have been on there," said Green. "I'm admitting that we were not forthright with that. It wasn't done intentionally. I object to the insinuation that there's some coverup involved. There's been some mistakes made, but it wasn't done intentionally."

Four-County hopes to open another center in Brunswick County with additional expansion funds from the state. It is been negotiating for space for a center in the Leland area.

The Cedar Grove Center's committee said its top priority is to move the Cedar Grove Head Start program to the larger Piney Grove building in Bolivia and to expand services to 80 children five days a week there, said committee President Lynne Wiegman.

Second on its priority list, said Ms. Wiegman, is to expand the Cedar Grove center to accommodate 40 children five days a week.

There will be 296 children cut from Four-County's Head Start programs in for the 1992-93 year, she said, some of whom will be in Brunswick County.

"There's another benefit to that which is very positive," said Green of the proposal to cut enrollment at the Cedar Grove site. "We increase contact time. What we propose to do is increase contact time by 60 percent."

The plan will have to be approved by the Head Start regional office in Atlanta.

"What happens to the other 20?" asked Carolyn Frink, policy council chairperson at the Cedar Grove center.

Marian Melvin, secretary of the Cedar Grove committee, said she supported the five days a week program because she wasn't aware that it meant cutting the number of children served in half. While 40 children are being served at the center, there are at least 90 in the community identified as in need of services, she said.

"I think a lot of other parents felt the same way," said Ms. Melvin. "What we're saying is it's better to serve 40 children two days a week than 20 five days a week."

Of the five counties served by Four-County, Brunswick County has been picked to benefit from expansion, said Green. He was to meet with community leaders, including Bolivia's Franklin Randolph and Brunswick County Four-County Board of Directors member Roscoe Butler Tuesday in Bolivia.

Randolph said he has complained for years that Brunswick County was being "short-changed" when it came to Head Start services and that he has asked Four-County to open five centers in the county.

Presently there are three programs with centers in Cedar Grove and Longwood. A center in the Northwest community was closed recently and children served in that region are being bused to a center in Armour, in neighboring Columbus County.

"It's high time Brunswick County be brought up to standards," said Randolph. "This is what I am holding to, and this is what I am fighting for."

Four-County receives funding to serve 1,013 children in five counties, or an average of $3,400 per child.

"It is my hope that we may be able to expand," said Green. "We're getting more careful consideration as we ask for more dollars to get our enrollment back up. It's definite that we're going to get another center."

STAFF PHOTO BY TERRY POPE

FOUR COUNTY Community Services Executive Director Richard Green (right) talks with Linda and Abdul Green of Supply, no relation, following a meeting at the Cedar Grove Head Start Center Monday.

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