

Dr. Kristie Jones wants to keep the momentum going.

On the heels of Alliance Health Center's \$10,000 donation to the Lowndes County School District's Early Learning Collaborative on Dec. 8, Jones is eager to find more individuals and businesses willing to support the initiative.

"We are so thankful for the generous donation from Alliance Health Center," Jones said. "The district's mission is to challenge all students to attain their greatest potential. The ELC program is a beautiful beginning. This is the perfect time for individuals and businesses in the area to help us in our mission."

Jones said the LCSD has made significant strides in the 2023-24 school year to expand its Pre-Kindergarten program. She said two classes have been added in the district and two more have been added at the Coleman Head Start.

In addition, Jones, who is the director of Federal Programs for the LCSD, said the district also has lowered the cost of Pre-K tuition from \$4,400 to \$2,200 and has updated all Pre-K classes including furniture, curriculum and instructional materials.

"The improvements at Coleman Head Start are remarkable," Jones said.

Jones said the LCSD's giving initiative will help it: 1) increase the number of students accepted into its Pre-K program; 2) add teachers and assistant teachers to reduce class sizes. (There currently are 20 students per class.); 3) provide Pre-K to all students at no cost to parents. (The LCSD currently offers six Title classes and three tuition classes.); 4) create accessible playgrounds and learning spaces for our Pre-K students with disabilities (Inclusive playgrounds) and create outdoor classrooms; and 5) provide professional development for teachers.

“I would love to talk to interested individuals and businesses in the community who are interested in assisting us,” Jones said. “There are so many great things we can do to help ensure students are properly prepared for the initial steps in their educational journey.”

In 2013, the state of Mississippi established the Early Learning Collaborative (ELC) Act. The law established a collaborative delivery, state-funded pre-kindergarten program in which private or parochial schools, private child-care centers and/or Head Start Centers may join with a local public school district and compete for state funds to provide pre-K services to a community. All funded collaboratives must adhere to state regulations requiring that they meet nationally recognized standards of quality.

Under the ELC Act of 2013, individuals or corporations that make contributions to support the local matching fund of an approved ELC may be eligible to receive a state tax credit for the donated amount up to \$1,000,000. The Mississippi Department of Revenue can approve 1:1 tax credits up to the amount the legislature appropriates to the ELC Act each year.

The ELC Act of 2013 established the cost of providing pre-K services to 4-year-old children at \$5,000 per child enrolled in a full-day program and \$2,500 per child enrolled in a half-day program. The state of Mississippi provides half of these costs. The state requires local matching funds to cover the other half. Those funds may include local tax dollars, federal dollars (as allowed), parent tuition, philanthropic contributions or in-kind donation of facilities, equipment and services required as part of the program, such as food service or health screenings.

To learn more about how you can invest in Pre-K in the state of Mississippi, go to: <https://www.lowndes.k12.ms.us/apps/pages/prek> or

<https://www.mississippifirst.org/we-support/early-education/pre-k-tax-credit/>

If you would like to contribute or if you would like more information about the ELC in Lowndes County, contact Jones at: kristie.jones@lowndes.k12.ms.us