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[The Vindicator](#)

(New Castle, PA) — When U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire took office nearly two years ago, his first meeting was with Lawrence County Social Services.

On Friday, he returned with a \$125,000 check to pay for improvements to the countywide Head Start early learning program that the agency operates.

“I’m passionate about Lawrence County and I’m passionate about early childhood education. When you represent six counties, you get a lot of requests for money, but this was at the top of my list,” Altmire said.

The money will be used to buy new educational materials and equipment for the six Head Start centers in the county, said Betsy Spargo, program director. The program offers preschool classes to 3- and 4-year-olds from families that fall at or below the federal government’s poverty standards. That means a family of four making \$20,000 or less a year would qualify.

Spargo said 429 children are enrolled at the programs: two offered in New Castle, and one center each in Ellwood City, the Villa Maria Education Center near the state border, and the Mohawk and Wilmington school districts.

“We are really excited to be able to offer new educational opportunities. The children deserve the highest quality,” Spargo said.

Spargo said this boost of federal funding should make the program one of the elite in the region.

The program will be moving to its new headquarters this fall in the former Ben Franklin Middle

School in New Castle.

Dr. C. Joyce Nicksick, superintendent of the Wilmington School District, said Head Start has better prepared pupils for the classroom in her district. Head Start began offering classes two years ago at East Lawrence Elementary, she said. There are 10 pupils in the class this year.

“We have an earlier relationship with the parents, and we can assess the pupils’ strengths and weaknesses even before kindergarten,” she said.