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## State's preschool efforts gain national attention

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The state's efforts to offer a preschool education to all 4-year-olds has gained national attention.

Pre-K Now, a Washington, D.C.-based public education and advocacy organization, recognized the Pre-K for All Louisiana campaign for outstanding leadership on pre-kindergarten and the success of its efforts to expand early education for the state's young children.

The campaign, led by the Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families, was represented by Dr. Geoffrey Nagle, director of the Tulane Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, who was on Capitol Hill to receive the award.

Louisiana is one of nine states to try to offer a universal preschool education.

Gov. Bobby Jindal signed into law Act 876 this month, which makes pre-kindergarten programs available to Louisiana 4-year-olds by 2013.

"Preschool helps build the foundation for the child that doesn't have all the oral language skills or books at home," said Wanda Gunn, Caddo interim superintendent. "We've seen great success with preschool because those children are able to catch up with their peers by the time they get to kindergarten."

In effort to offer the program to all 4-year-olds, Caddo has added new classes at Hillsdale, Northside, North Highlands, Riverside, Summerfield, University and Walnut Hill elementary schools. Caddo offers preschool programs at each of its elementary schools and two pre-kindergarten centers.

"We had to add classes because we had parents on waiting lists to get in," Gunn said.

Currently, Bossier has 10 prekindergarten program sites. The sites are Bossier, Central Park, Plantation Park, Meadowview, Waller, Carrie Martin, Platt, Princeton, Rodes and Kerr elementary schools.

Sally Namie, assistant superintendent of curriculum for Bossier schools, said the district might expand its preschool programs in the future.

The programs are funded with Title I money, grants and the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Program — the state Education Department's preschool initiative.

"The best thing about this program is that there are actual certified teachers in the classroom and they aren't just coloring," said Raeann Ebarb, whose son, Ian, 5, graduated from a pre-kindergarten class at Princeton Elementary School. "It's really hands-on learning, not just watching television."