Most WA Students Skip Summer Learning Programs

Local News

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ROCHESTER, Wash. - In Washington's smallest towns, students' options for learning and meals that are normally part of the school day can disappear during the summer months. But this year, 17 rural summer programs will get a hand from School's Out Washington. They are recipients of "Feed Your Brain" grants, to allow more kids to attend programs that keep their skills sharp until they're back in school.

Gabrielle Davis is program manager for ROOF Community Services, a grant recipient in Rochester. In the Thurston County town of about 2,000, ROOF also runs a food bank and provides some emergency services to families. Davis says the needs this year are high.

"A lot of times, it's easier to see poverty in more urban communities, and it's a lot harder in rural communities because it's a little more hidden. So, it's great that they're reaching out to the rural communities in Washington, so that those kids can also have opportunities."

Danny McDonald is superintendent of the Touchet School District near Walla Walla, in an unincorporated area with fewer than 300 children, many of them lower-income. He says, particularly in this economy, grants like "Feed Your Brain" come to the rescue.

"We're a small, rural school - and summer school for us is important, but it's one of those issues that we really need help on, because we don't have any extra money to take care of our summer school program."

A list of "Feed Your Brain" grant recipients is online at www.schoolsoutwashington.org.

In a new national survey by state, the Afterschool Alliance found four out of five kids in Washington are not enrolled in summer learning programs. The reasons are primarily cost and, in some areas, a lack of programs - although almost 80 percent of parents surveyed said they would support public funding for summer learning. The Afterschool Alliance study is online at www.afterschoolalliance.org.