

News-Register 8-22-2013



Photos by Sarah Harmon

City officials, employees and families of the Head Start center in Moundsville stand among the 37 empty seats representing 37 children cut from the local program due to federal funding cuts. Pictured, in front row, are Barbara Hollanbough, Krenna Allender, parent, Ginger DeWitt, city councilwoman, Becky Gooch Erbacher, executive director of West Virginia Head Start and Marlene Midget, executive director of Northern Panhandle Head Start. In back row, from left, are city councilman Dave Wood, Mayor Gene Saunders and city manger Deanna Hess.

■ MOUNDSVILLE ■

Lots of Empty Seats

Sequester hits close to home for Head Start

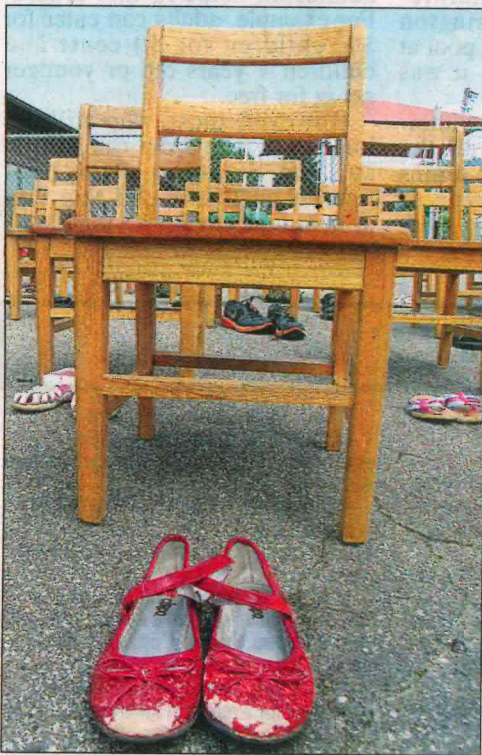
By SARAH HARMON
Staff Writer

To the families and employees of the Northern Panhandle Head Start in Moundsville, the 37 empty seats on display Wednesday at the Fourth Street facility represent 37 local children who lost services from Head Start in July due to federal funding cuts.

City officials and families gathered at the Fourth Street center to participate in the national "Empty Seats equals Lost Opportunities" campaign. To illustrate the impact of budget cuts on the nation's families, Head Start centers across the country are displaying an empty chair for each child that has been cut from the program.

"This is a very symbolic time for us," Marlene Midget, executive director of Northern Panhandle Head Start, said. "This is the first year we have had to cut back. This is hitting everyone."

The Moundsville agency lost \$270,000 in July, representing a funding cut of 5.27 percent. The programs serving children age 3-5 at the Creative Learning 1 and Creative Learning 2 centers, both located at 2200 Fourth St., Moundsville, were eliminated and eight employees lost jobs.



Thirty-seven empty seats with 37 pairs of shoes were displayed at the Moundsville Head Start Center Wednesday for the Empty Seats equals Lost Opportunities campaign.

According to Becky Gooch Erbacher, executive director of the West Virginia Head Start Associa-

tion, Head Start and Early Head Start programs have lost \$3.1 million in federal funding statewide.

She said the Office of Head Start has estimated 461 children and families have lost spots in the state program and 80 employees have lost full-time employment.

For some parents and grandparents attending the event, the effects of sequestration hit very close to home.

"My grandchildren go to Head Start and if there wasn't Head Start, they would have to be home alone," Moundsville Councilwoman Ginger DeWitt said. "There would be no food for them, no teeth brushed, no children to play with to learn to socialize."

"While our West Virginia's members of Congress are at home on recess this month, it is our hope that they take the time to visit a Head Start or Early Head Start program and see our programs in action," Erbacher said. "We would like our members of Congress to talk to staff and parents about the difficulties their programs and families are facing to better understand the

lost opportunities for our most vulnerable children if the sequester is not reversed."