

WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

STEP, STEP Head Start and Stevens Primary School partner for family success, community engagement

STEP, STEP Head Start and Stevens Primary School (WASD) have partnered to create the program "Stevens Promise" that sees students and their families work with teachers and community agencies to create a foundation for educational success.

The program provides a clear pathway to high-quality education from pre-kindergarten through third grade.

Some participants are referred by Stevens staff; others join the program while enrolled in STEP Head Start, before moving up to kindergarten. Stevens Promise provides Head Start students with a support network to ensure a positive transition from pre-kindergarten into kindergarten.

At Stevens, a community intervention specialist assists participants during the school day, serving as an accessible point of contact between the school's staff and the student's family.

A STEP family navigator supports the family in helping the student at home, also while providing resources for the family as they

seek to address housing concerns, find or maintain employment, meet transportation needs and overcome other barriers to self-sufficiency.

Stevens Promise is being funded by an Early Childhood Education Innovation Zone grant, as part of Pennsylvania's federally-funded Race to the Top — Early Learning Challenge Grant. The money is being used not just for service navigation, but for other activities and programs that enhance the primary school experience.

In May, Stevens hosted a Family Fun Night. In addition to being the PTA's largest annual fundraiser, the event provided an opportunity for many community supporters of the school to engage with students and their families. Students enjoyed a variety of carnival-style games operated by WAMS and WAHS athletes, while families also were encouraged to attend informational sessions focused on various safety topics.

The Innovation Zone grant also is helping to fund the Stevens pilot

run of a walking school bus. Stevens primarily is a walking school — buses do not serve most children who attend — and the walking school bus improves pedestrian safety and alleviates the concerns of parents who are unable to accompany their child to school.

Volunteers from community organizations, parents and Stevens staff operate the "bus," teaching good walking and street-crossing habits and provide the students with a chance for exercise before school.

Future events include a nutrition workshop for participating families, in which students and their families will make a few wholesome recipes, learn how to integrate more health-conscious foods into their regular grocery shopping and be provided with incentives to continue practicing good nutrition habits.

Students will learn the importance of "eating the rainbow" and sampling all of the food groups, while strengthening math, science and language skills.