

To: The Daily Mining Gazette  
From: Houghton-Portage Township Schools  
Contact: Dennis Harbour, 482-0451 or Harvey Filppula, 482-3663  
Date: Oct. 4, 2002

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Family literacy program to serve Houghton County**

#### **Project to help parents finish high school, earn GED**

HOUGHTON – Houghton-Portage Township Public Schools has received a four-year grant from the Michigan Department of Education to provide Even Start family-literacy services to Houghton County residents.

The \$250,000-a-year program is designed to help parents with children under age 8 to earn a high school diploma or GED while developing parenting and child-development skills geared toward strengthening families.

“We’re really excited to offer this service to area residents,” said Dennis Harbour, Houghton-Portage Township superintendent. “This program offers parents a chance to finish their degree or GED requirements, which means a lot in today’s economy.”

State Rep. Rich Brown, D-Bessemer, agreed.

“I think it’s a very important program for families that pays great dividends over time,” Brown said. “It’s critical that we continue programs of this nature.”

B-H-K Child Development Board will provide most of the services, which are tailored to help parents in different situations to complete their education while developing other family-empowering skills. These include:

- A weekly home visit from a trained Family Literacy Teacher. These visits cover literacy and child development topics. Participants are provided GED textbooks and other materials, including use of laptop computers.
- Arrangement of GED testing services.
- Access to a Parent Resource Center at the Portage Family Place in Houghton. This center offers an adult computer lab with skill-development software; a toy-lending library from which parents may borrow toys, books and other learning materials for their children; playgroups and story hours for parents and children; and a casual meeting place for families with young children to get to know other families.
- Support groups for fathers and teen parents.

- Parenting workshops on a variety of topics.
- Access to other services such as Head Start, Early Head Start, preschool, childcare, health and developmental screenings and savings programs.

The Even Start program has a special component to allow teen parents to stay in school. Even Start home visitors work with area schools to provide home-bound education for participants for up to six weeks around birth.

“Part of the beauty of this Even Start program is the flexibility it provides parents,” said Harvey Filppula, a retired school administrator who now oversees B-H-K’s Even Start services. “With the broad range of options, there’s no reason why anyone shouldn’t finish high school or earn their GED.”

Two other Even Start programs provide adult-education services in the Copper Country. The Baraga County Even Start program is overseen by the Copper Country Intermediate School District and Western U.P. District Health Department. The northern Houghton/Keweenaw counties is operated collaboratively by the Public Schools of Calumet-Laurium-Keweenaw and the Keweenaw Family Resource Center offer the program. The Salvation Army was the co-applicant on the Houghton County project.

An Open House at the Portage Family Place Family Resource Center is planned for later this month. The center is located at 503 Park Avenue in Houghton near the Hillside Restaurant. The Baraga and northern Houghton/Keweenaw county Even Start programs also have Parent Resource Centers, located on Hecla Street in Laurium and Pennock Avenue in Baraga.

For more information, call 482-3663 or 1-800-236-5657.