A young ASSERT student and his teacher work together.

A preschool program at Utah State University for children on the autism spectrum has received an additional $75,000 in ongoing funding from the Utah Legislature.

According to Tom Higbee, director of the Autism Support Services: Education, Research and Training (ASSERT) program at the Center for Persons with Disabilities, the funds will be used to expand the program.

“It means more kids, more graduate students and more undergrads,” he said. “We’re excited to be able to expand. It lets us do more of what we already do: the training of students and serving families of children with autism.”

ASSERT will be opening an afternoon session starting in the fall, with room for at least two more families. Openings will be allocated to the morning or afternoon session based on what works best for the school district and the parents.

Sen. Lyle Hillyard was instrumental in securing the additional funding for the program, Higbee said.

“It’s very exciting,” he said. “We’ve never gotten increases (in funding), only decreases that were then restored. This is the first ever addition.”