



COMMUNITY ACTION

## Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency: Now is the time to think about September preschool enrollment

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Where is your child going to preschool next school year? September seems like a long way off and you may not be thinking about this question right now, but now is exactly the time that you need to start thinking of a preschool for your child. Why so soon? For two reasons. One, you'll want to thoroughly investigate where you will be sending your child to school, and secondly, preschool programs can only enroll a certain number of children, and those enrollment slots fill up fast!

Where should you begin? Start by calling the preschool programs that you are considering for your child and ask some preliminary questions that will help you make an informed decision. Initial questions regarding program cost, location and classroom days and hours may assist you to rule out a program or keep it on your list to pursue further. Next, visit the programs you are considering without your child. Consider from this visit how you were greeted when you arrived, if the program is licensed by New York state, if the environment is safe and clean, if the adult-child interactions are friendly, if children are actively engaged, and what the teachers' education requirements and experience are.

Next, revisit the programs you liked with your child and get his/her reaction. Do not hesitate to ask more questions regarding the program's curriculum goals, as well as the program's policies regarding sick children, adult-child ratios, medication administration, meals service and parent involvement opportunities. Additionally, make an unannounced visit to each of the programs. Finally, talk to parents of currently enrolled students to get their opinions. By taking the time now to investigate a variety of program options available to you in the community, you should be able to find the program that fits your needs and those of your child's.

Here is some initial information about Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency's Head Start, Head Start/universal prekindergarten, and Early Head Start programs that may assist you in your decision.

Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency's Head Start program is a comprehensive child development program for eligible children ages birth to 5 and their families. The program provides education, health, nutrition, disability and family services. All Head Start program services, including transportation, are free. Head Start sites, licensed by New York state, are located in Auburn, Southern Cayuga, Cato and Moravia. The program is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children, Youth and Families; it serves 292 3-5-year-old children and 76 pregnant mothers, infants and/or toddlers and their families in Cayuga County each year. Head Start offers full-day, half-day and combination option classes, as well as a home visiting option.

Partnerships with the Auburn, Moravia, Southern Cayuga and Jordan-Elbridge school districts provide Head Start/UPK collaborative classrooms. Blending Head Start funds with state UPK funds gives us the opportunity to offer enhanced full-day services for 4-year-old children prior to their transition to kindergarten. Head Start/UPK services are also free and include transportation. Our Head Start/UPK collaborative classrooms serve approximately 140 children annually.

I encourage all parents of children who will be attending preschool this fall to investigate the many wonderful and vastly different preschool programs offered in Cayuga County. Take the time now to find the one that best meets your needs, where your child will be safe and happy, and where his/her first formal educational experience will be a positive one.

To find out more about the Head Start or UPK programs, or to visit one or more of our six locations and meet our highly qualified education staff, please call (315) 252-0038 ext. 207.