

**COMMUNITY ACTION**

Head Start helps parents, children prepare for school transition

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Summer has flown by and we are looking forward to an exciting start to the Early Childhood Development program at Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency. Staff will be returning soon to prepare for the arrival of new and returning students. They will be setting up classrooms, making appointments to home visit every student and family, and receiving pre-service training before classes begin on Wednesday, Sept. 4! Staff will also be assisting families to ensure that every child has the required physical, immunizations and dental screening necessary to begin Head Start.

The opening day of school is exciting and sometimes scary for preschool children, as well as their families, who may be sending a child to school for the very first time. This day often includes a lot of firsts in a young child's life — leaving mommy and daddy for the first time, the first bus ride, meeting new friends and learning new routines are all things that may contribute to their feelings of uncertainty. Experienced Head Start staff are well-prepared to meet the challenges children and their families face, and ensure that each child has a successful first day and a whole year full of new and fun educational experiences. The teachers will instill in the children a love for learning, which will give them a strong foundation for success in kindergarten and the school years that follow.

Head Start is a comprehensive child development program for income-eligible children, ages 3 to 5, and their families. The program provides education, health, nutrition, disability and family services at no charge. Licensed Head Start sites are located in Auburn, Cato, Moravia and Southern Cayuga. Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, Head Start serves 292 children and their families in Cayuga County annually. Partnerships with the Auburn, Moravia, Southern Cayuga and Jordan-Elbridge School districts provide Head Start/universal prekindergarten 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. Eight classrooms provide Head Start/UPK programming to Cayuga County children.

Early Head Start, a year-round program, offers home visits and classroom sessions for enrolled participants. Early Head Start's mission is to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, enhance the development of the very young child, and promote healthy family functioning. The program provides education, health, dental, mental health and disability services through both home-based and combination option programming. There are currently 76 participants in the Auburn and Moravia areas of Cayuga County. Participants in the EHS program have the opportunity to receive family support services from pregnancy to age 3, at which time they can transition to the Head Start program and continue services until entering kindergarten. This provides a seamless delivery of an

educational experience from birth to kindergarten for children who enter the EHS program and remain throughout their preschool years.

Our philosophy that parents are their child's first teachers makes Head Start and Early Head Start programs successful. We strengthen the parents' roles as teachers by working respectfully and cooperatively with families, building on their strengths and assisting parents to reach their goals for themselves and their children. By blending the expertise and experiences of the family with the program, Head Start achieves a quality preschool experience for all children.

For more information regarding Head Start, Early Head Start or universal prekindergarten, please call (315) 252-0038.