



COMMUNITY ACTION

Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency: Head Start ready for a new school year



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We are back to school and off to an exciting start here at the Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency's Early Childhood Development component! Head Start staff came back from summer vacation in August to prepare for the arrival of new students. They set up classrooms, home visited with every student and their families, and received pre-service training. The staff assisted families to ensure that each child had the required physical, immunizations, and dental screening necessary to begin Head Start classes on Sept. 3. The first day of school is always an exciting and scary time for preschool children, as well as their families. Leaving mommy and daddy for the first time, the first bus ride, meeting new friends, and learning new routines all contribute to the uncertainty. Head Start staff is always well prepared to meet the many challenges the children and their

families face and to ensure that each child has a successful first day and a year full of new learning experiences that instills in them a love for learning.

Head Start is a comprehensive child development program for income eligible children ages 3-5 and their families. The program provides education, health, nutrition, disability and family services at no charge. Licensed Head Start sites are located in Auburn, Southern Cayuga, Cato and Moravia. Funded by the 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/UPK collaborative classrooms. Blending Head Start funds with state Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) funds gives us the opportunity to offer enhanced full-day services for four-year-old children prior to their transition to kindergarten. Our Head Start/UPK collaborative classrooms serve close to 140 children annually.

The Early Head Start program, which is a year-round program, continues with 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 program options and currently has 76 participants in the Auburn and Moravia areas of Cayuga County. Participants in the EHS program have the opportunity to receive early, continuous, intensive and comprehensive child development and family support services from pregnancy to age three at which time they can transition to the Head Start program and continue services until entering kindergarten.

What makes the Head Start and Early Head Start programs successful and different from other preschool programs is the core philosophy that parents are their child's first teachers. The programs work respectfully and cooperatively with families building on their strengths, assisting parents with their goals for themselves and their children, and blending the expertise and experiences of both the program and the family to achieve a quality preschool experience for all children.

Opportunities for parental engagement are numerous and varied. New this year, staff will implement a Financial Literacy Pilot Program for Head Start and Early Head Start parents, over 90 percent of whom are low-income and struggle financially. The Program will offer two four-week parent workshops that will cover a range of topics. The objectives of this project are to address a critical need among our low-income population to increase fiscal literacy that includes working within a budget, developing healthy financial habits regardless of income, recognizing the value of savings and asset building, and planning for a better future. The Financial Literacy Pilot Program is made possible with financial support from the Cayuga Community Fund. For more information regarding Head Start, Early Head Start, or Universal Pre-Kindergarten, please call (315) 252-0038.