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SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN IS A PRIORITY AT 0-5 HEAD START

For some of us, the first day of kindergarten was so traumatic that we can still remember it, and the memory generates feelings of fear and/or the upset stomach we had “way back when we were five”.

Those memories and feelings are not as rare as we might think. The transition to kindergarten is one of the most painful and stressful points in a child’s life. Leaving the safe harbor of your home; your parent’s care; and having to meet 20+ new people, all your same age, in one day, in a strange environment, with a strange adult or adults in charge ... and you have been told not to speak to strangers! What were “they” thinking?

How “well it goes” will have a direct impact not only on how quickly we are successful in school, but often how successful we are in those first K-5 school years. Research shows that elementary school is second in importance in the learning foundation of a child, beaten out only by those formative years from birth to age 5. Therefore, the transition support given to prepare young children to transition from home, pre-school, and daycare to the often more formal and fast-paced kindergarten environment will help support a long-term successful school experience.

“EightCAP, Inc. 0-5 Head Start, serving Gratiot, Isabella, Ionia, and Montcalm counties, has such a transition support process,” explains Nancy Secor, 0-5 Head Start Manager. “Our goal is to help insure our Head Start children and families enter kindergarten as smoothly and successfully as possible and become solid learners, participating fully in the K-12 learning environment.”

This transition plan provides several transitional activities throughout the school year, including: 1) training teachers and parents about effective transitions focused on the ongoing attention to a child’s current and future needs, 2) visiting kindergarten classrooms, 3) reviewing Kindergarten Parent Guides with parents, 4) preparing portfolios for each child’s next teacher and placement, and 5) teaching children the rules for being safe on and around the bus.

“The staff are very friendly, dedicated, and communicate well,” said Lynette Passmore a Head Start parent from Mt. Pleasant. “What my daughter has learned from her Head Start experience will help prepare her for success in kindergarten.”

“They have really been good with my son,” stated Parent Bonnie Keene, a Greenville Head Start parent. “He was scared at first but they made him feel comfortable. He knows what to expect next year in kindergarten.”

How to safely ride a bus is part of that successful transition. While providing transportation for Head Start children, ages 3-5, the bus staff have been trained to teach children how to board and exit the bus in a safe manner, how to ride safely, where the danger zones are around the bus, and how to use the bus driver’s direct signals to safely cross the road.

“The bus staff continually makes sure that the children are involved in watching for the sign to cross the street,” explains Dee Evans, Head Start Transportation Supervisor. “Asking children if it is safe or not safe to cross and asking the child to check for any oncoming motor vehicles so that they know to continue to look for them as they attempt to cross any street is all part of every day activities.”

“I appreciate that fact that my son has learned that as soon as you get on the bus, you take your backpack off and go to your seat to get your seatbelt on,” shared Holly Thrush, Mt. Pleasant Head Start parent. “He says, ‘Buckle up to be safe’.”

Lastly, each year in the first week of March, 0-5 Head Start schedules Kindergarten Informational Meetings in all four counties. Representatives from local school districts are invited to talk to the Head Start parents about the programs their school district offers, how to register their child, and how parents can play an important role in their child’s education. Free childcare and dinner are always provided for these meetings so every parent can attend.

For more information on the 0-5 Head Start Transition to Kindergarten procedures and policies, contact those listed above or Nancy Secor, 0-5 Head Start Manager, at (866) 754-9315, x 3319, or nsecor@8cap.org.

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