



Riverbend Head Start Seeks Snap Recipients With Young Children

June 16 2022 10:44 AM

Riverbend Head Start and Family Services' Granite City South Center had celebrated an awesome school year with a fun water splash day on the playground.

MADISON - Recently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Head Start announced that families currently enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) would now be automatically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services, including school readiness, nutrition, and family support. Previously, this option only existed for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and children in foster care or experiencing homelessness. *"This newly expanded eligibility for SNAP recipients will allow us to offer our comprehensive early learning and family development program services to help more vulnerable residents thrive in the Madison County, Illinois area,"* said Gene Howell, President, and CEO of Riverbend Head Start and Family Services.

Each year, Riverbend Head Start and Family Services provide over 700 children and families with critical programs that develop early learning skills in social and emotional well-being, healthy lifestyles, language and literacy skills, mathematics, and other academic needs. The program also empowers parents with life skills, guidance on decision making, and setting individual and family goals. *"As we continue to recruit for the upcoming 2022-'23 school year, the new SNAP eligibility will allow us to meet our enrollment numbers. We're hoping to enroll about 300 children including pregnant mothers in our Early Head Start Home-Based program and over 400 in our Head Start Center-Based program. Historically, we have always been full but over the past couple of years, it's been challenging to reach full enrollment for many reasons – some of course due to the pandemic. This is a great time for families with young children and SNAP benefits to apply."* Head Start is a model that encompasses education for school readiness, health services, disability, and family support services. There are opportunities for parents to participate in a variety of activities as well; such as

participation in the classrooms, Parent Group and Policy Council, and in a bus monitor capacity.

In the Head Start home-visit-based program, Family Advocate staff work with the child's family to have a positive and engaging, home-school connection. To prepare enrolled children for school beyond preschool age, staff provides support to the family. Head Start staff are highly trained in early education, Head Start standards, and Illinois licensing regulations.

Head Start has full-day and part-day classrooms located across Madison County, Illinois with six centers serving the following areas: Alton, Bethalto, Collinsville, Cottage Hills, East Alton, Edwardsville, Glen Carbon, Godfrey, Granite City, Hartford, Highland, Madison, Marine, Maryville, Meadowbrook, Moro, Troy, Venice, and surrounding communities.

Home-based options are available as well. The home-based children and their families participate in Learn and Play sessions once a month to encourage social and emotional skill development. Riverbend Head Start's Health Advocate staff also make home visits to allow the family opportunities to discuss and address any health concerns including dental, vision, hearing, developmental and prenatal to ensure proper care and attention to the family's health needs.

Parents seeking a comprehensive school readiness program for children from birth to 5 years old including pregnant mothers, should contact Riverbend Head Start and Family Services at 618-463-5946 or enroll@riverbendfamilies.org, or visit www.riverbendfamilies.org for more information.