

80 percent of Head Starters ready to enter kindergarten

NEW BRITAIN — More than 80 percent of Head Start/School Readiness preschoolers enrolled at the Human Resources Agency of New Britain are suitably prepared to enter kindergarten next fall, the organization said Thursday.

The data show 170 of HRA's 212 four-year-olds meet or exceed expectations for school readiness, said Rocco Tricarico, executive director of HRA.

"We are very proud of our program," he said. "This is the fourth year in a row that so many of our preschoolers exceeded the national and state averages for being school-ready."

Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five from low-income families by enhancing cognitive, social, and emotional development.

HRA follows "national best practice" for kindergarten milestones in those areas, as well as cognition, language, literacy, mathematic and physical development. Tricarico said the standards meet the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in state departments of education.

"Equally significant is how much these 4-year-olds learned in just nine months. Their mathematic development improved by 54 percent. In September 2015, only 24 percent of the 212 children met or exceeded widely held expectations in mathematics," said Tricarico. "By May of this year, 78 percent of the same children met or exceeded expectations in this area."

Mary Lombardi, education/disability senior manager, said children entered the program in September with the weakest scores in mathematics and cognitive development, but by May, "had shown the greatest improvements in these areas."

Head Start Director Liz Donnellan attributes the growth to the Head Start philosophy. "In the end it's giving the children and families the comprehensive educational, health, nutritional and developmental services that they need," she said.

"It takes dedicated teachers, staff and the community, together with engaged parents, to make this happen. This is the Head Start philosophy — and it works."

— Christopher Fortier, staff writer

CORRECTIONS

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