

Program gets youngest students ready for school

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While most children are enjoying summer vacation, nearly 300 children in 17 classrooms at Mercer County school districts are preparing for the upcoming school year, all as part of the Success by 6 initiative.

The program, funded by the United Way, provides children an opportunity to get some in-class time ahead of the regular school year, while learning the fundamentals of following directions and social interaction, plus fine motor skills, communication skills and recognizing letters and numbers.

Recently, a crew of linemen and the Mercer/Lawrence area service coordinator from Penn Power got to see the students in action

at the Success by 6 classroom at Reynolds Elementary School, under the direction of Maria Hassell, a Reynolds teacher, and Nicole Landfried, the Mercer County Head Start teacher from the Reynolds classroom.

Hassell said the students were working on numbers, letters and writing their names, in addition to learning about proper behavior in the classroom, including lining

“Part of this program will help alleviate the stress these kids will face on the first day of school,” said Jim Micsky, executive director of the United Way of Mercer County, “and the teachers regularly and consistently say they have seen an improvement for many of the students throughout the six-week pro-

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SOUTH SHENANGO TOWNSHIP — Jill Murrin, vice-president and manager of the First National Bank branch in Jamestown, presented the final installment of a five-part financial literacy program to students at the Success By 6 classroom at Jamestown Elementary Thursday. The program teaches children about money — including spending wisely, saving, giving and how to make money.

gram.”

The Success by 6 program started in 2004 in Mercer County, with five classrooms and about 88 students.

Since then, it has grown to 17 classrooms at all of the Mercer County school districts, with exception of Lakeview, and sees about 300 students who will enter kindergarten in the fall.

“This really is a true game changer for many of the families with children in our communities,” Micsky said. “This year will mark the graduation year for our first class of students who went through the very Success by 6 classrooms, and one of the students will graduate in the top five of their class at Mercer.”

As part of the Success by 6 program, the children learn about financial literacy through a partnership with Junior Achievement.

The financial literacy program is presented by area bankers, including Bill Murrin, vice-president and manager of the First National Bank in Jamestown.

Murrin, a long-time volunteer with the United Way, presented the program to students at the Success by 6 classroom at Jamestown.

“It is amazing what they know, and it is very rewarding to work with them,” Murrin said after presenting the final installment of the financial literacy program at Jamestown.

“They learn about the concept of money, about saving, giving and responsibility,” she added.

In the Success by 6 classroom returning to Jamestown after several years of hiatus, Jamestown kindergarten teacher Ally Blaschak said



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SOUTH SHENANGO TOWNSHIP — Kristen Hope, the principal at Jamestown Elementary, and Debbie White, a Jamestown district para-professional, help some of the Success by 6 students at the school tear apart story cards during the final financial literacy presentation Thursday.

that she has seen a marked improvement from when the students first started attending the program.

“This really has been a good experience,” Blaschak said while Murrin finished up the final financial literacy presentation.

Blaschak went on to say the day the 18 Success by 6 students experience is not much different than what they will see when they start school in a couple of weeks.

While she has been a teacher at the Jamestown district for six years, this is Blaschak’s first year working as a Success by 6 educator.

She was also working with Stephanie McJunkin, a Head Start teacher at Lakeview, and Debbie White, one of Jamestown’s para-professionals.

Jamestown Elementary Principal Kristen Hope said that she is excited to see the number of stu-

dents who are participating, saying “I think early childhood education is the foundation and any head start or kick forward we can give them is crucial for their success.”

She said if it’s warranted, she would like to see an additional classroom at Jamestown, providing the opportunity to more students to prepare for rigors of school.

Hope said that the teachers have reported the students are enjoying the experience, and the students are getting used to the structure and routine that school will provide.

Micsky also said that the participants of the Success by 6 program also undergo vision screenings and learn about dental hygiene, through cooperatives with the Keystone Blind Association and dental health professionals.

Additionally, the United Way recently hosted a Stuff the Bus event, where school supplies, under-

wear, socks and other essentials that can be used in the classrooms, were collected and will be distributed to the participating Success by 6 classrooms.

The goal of Success by 6 is to prepare children for school and “helps put them on the right track for a future of education,” Micsky said.