

COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY — PICNIC AT LINCOLN SCHOOL

HEAD START FUN



CITIZEN PATRIOT • NICK DENTAMARO

Charles Diggins, 5, of Jackson sticks out his tongue as he participates in the potato-sack race Thursday at the Community Action Agency's Head Start picnic.

Hundreds of families attend annual picnic

By Tarryl Jackson

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Hundreds of Jackson-area families enjoyed free food and games on a sunny Thursday as part of a 15-year tradition at Lincoln School.

Children — most younger than 5 — petted farm animals, had potato-sack races, and played hopscotch and bean bag toss at the Community Action Agency's Head Start picnic.

"It's just a celebration of the end of the school year," said Mary Cunningham DeLuca, the non-profit agency's director of children's programs. "Everything is about kids and families."

The event averages about 1,500 to 2,000 people each year.

Families also received a free lunch, got a chance to get a family portrait, and participated in a variety of arts and crafts and other activities. About 50 students from Vandercook Lake High School volunteered for the event.

"It's wonderful to know that the community gets together like this," said Jackson resident Sara Doty, whose 2-year-old daughter, Journie, was enrolled in Early Head Start this year.

Head Start is a federally funded child-development program that serves primarily low-income children ages 3 to 5.

Children who complete Head Start are prepared for kindergarten, excited about learning and confident about their abilities, officials say.

Doty, currently a full-time student at Jackson Community College, did not want Journie to fall

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From left, Alexis Burgess, 5, Katelynn Baker, 5, and Austin Bycraft, 2, say hello to Firepup the Fire Safety Dog at the picnic.

CAA hosts annual picnic

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behind academically.

"She's progressed so far and so well," Doty said. "I'm amazed."

At the start of the school year, the Community Action Agency's Head Start program had a waiting list of 300 children — about three times more than expected.

As more low-income families experience job loss and increased living costs, more parents have sought free assistance for early education and child care, officials say.

In Jackson County, 529 children were enrolled in Head Start and 100 children were enrolled in Early Head Start.

Early Head Start is designed for pregnant mothers and eligible families who have children ages 3 and younger.

Summit Township resident Tanya Blair has 5-year-old twin boys, Justin and Jaylin, who will graduate from Head Start this year. Her 2-year-old daughter, Jessanya, will be enrolled in the program next year.

"Their speech has improved and so has their attitude toward school," she said as the two boys enjoyed a potato-sack race.