

Catholic agencies part of Baltimore Head Start expansion

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Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore are among Baltimore agencies expanding Head Start programs as part of a citywide initiative aimed at children age 5 and younger, and their families.

As Head Start providers, the Catholic agencies have joined with Baltimore City Head Start, the Y of Central Maryland and the Maryland Family Network to form a new Head Start Collaborative. The collaborative has devised strategies to increase the percentage of Head Start participants “fully ready” for kindergarten, according to St. Vincent de Paul.

Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake announced the collaboration and grant funding for participating programs June 12.

The strategy includes increasing the number of 3-year-olds in the program from 2,220 to 2,600 children; expanding all Baltimore City Head Start programs to six-hour days; lengthening the Head Start school year by 10 days; and standardizing reporting, curriculum, assessment, training and technical assistance within all city Head Start programs.

Head Start is a federal program that promotes school readiness among children in low-income families, from birth to age 5.

Catholic Charities’ Head Start programs will expand from eight to 15 sites and increase the number of children and families served from 276 to 667. St. Vincent de Paul will maintain its seven current Head Start programs.

The Mayor’s Office of Human Services, Baltimore City Public Schools and B’More for Healthy Babies are also participating in the collaborative.

In a June 12 statement, Catholic Charities called the strategy “a holistic approach to Head Start programming.”

“Lives have been improved and Baltimore is better as a result of Head Start,” William J. McCarthy Jr., Catholic Charities executive director, said in a statement. “We look forward to working with each child and each family on a path to both recognize and achieve their unlimited potential.”

John Schiavone, St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore president and CEO, called investment in Head Start “crucial” in a June 12 statement.

“Access to quality early childhood development programs is central to any effort to break the cycle of poverty,” he said. “Access to high quality early interventions like

Head Start means that children are more likely to graduate from high school and college, are less likely to need special education services, and are less likely to repeat grades.”

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