



2025-2026 HEAD START ANNUAL REPORT



MISSION STATEMENT

NWCA Head Start assists children in achieving appropriate physical and developmental growth. We also increase self-confidence and expand each child's ability to think, reason, and communicate. Head Start assists parents and families in improving their parenting skills, self-sufficiency, and the conditions in which they live, learn, and work.

Program Goal

NWCA will nurture social-emotional health, fostering internal motivation to learn.

- Enhance Educational Qualifications and Professional Development.
- Foster Health, Nutrition, and Well-being of Children by Enhancing Health Education, Promotion, and Supportive Services
- Enhance Family Engagement to Foster Positive Relationships and Improve Child and Family Outcomes

Head Start Leadership Team

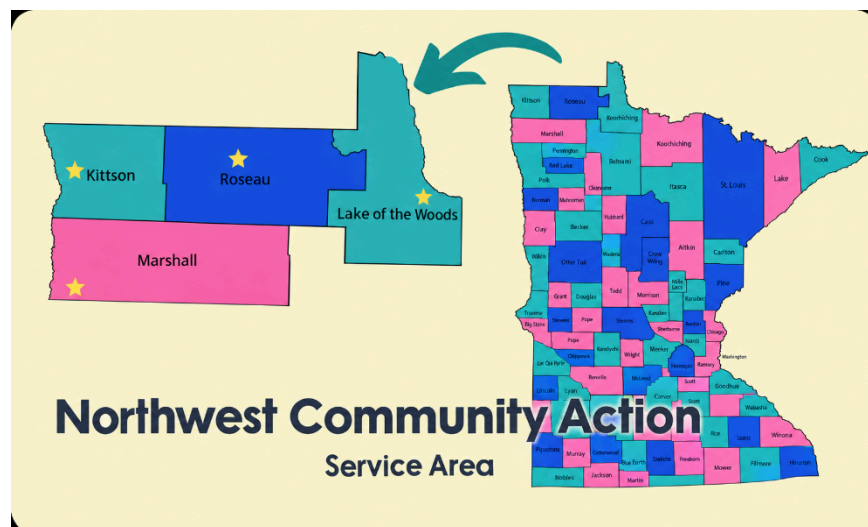
Sara Lee	Head Start Director
Crystal Peterson	HS Education Manager
Melissa Kostrzewski	Asst Education Manager
Brittany Carpenter	EHS Education Manager
Jackie Stinson	Family Services Manager
Aubrey Johnson	Family Services/IT Support
JoAnn Christian	Health Manager
Monica Byre	Asst Health Manager
Emily Kuznia	Instructional Coach
Natasha Lee	Office Assistant

Head Start: Serving families prenatal to age five

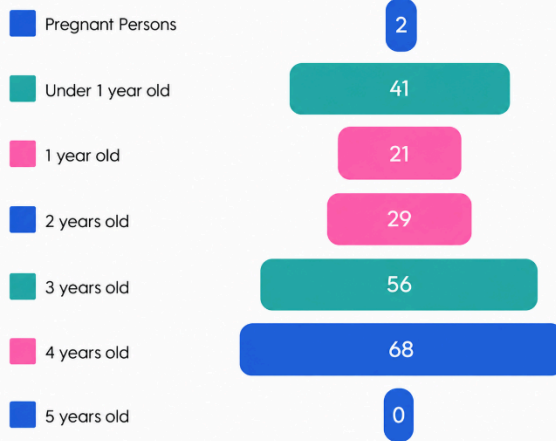
NWCA Head Start serves 197 children and families across Lake of the Woods, Roseau, Marshall, and Kittson counties through home-based and center-based services. The program provides early learning opportunities, health screenings,

nutritious meals, and family support services while partnering with parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Families are encouraged to participate in home visits, conferences, parent meetings, and Policy Council activities to support their child's success.

Northwest Community Action, Inc. (NWCA) provides Head Start services to families in Marshall, Roseau, Kittson, and Lake of the Woods counties in northwestern Minnesota. Serving a rural area of more than 6,500 square miles and over 32,000 residents, the program reaches communities ranging from 50 to 2,700 people. All four counties are designated as medically underserved, and approximately 50% of enrolled families qualify based on income guidelines. Head Start supports children and families by providing high-quality early learning, health services, and family engagement opportunities.

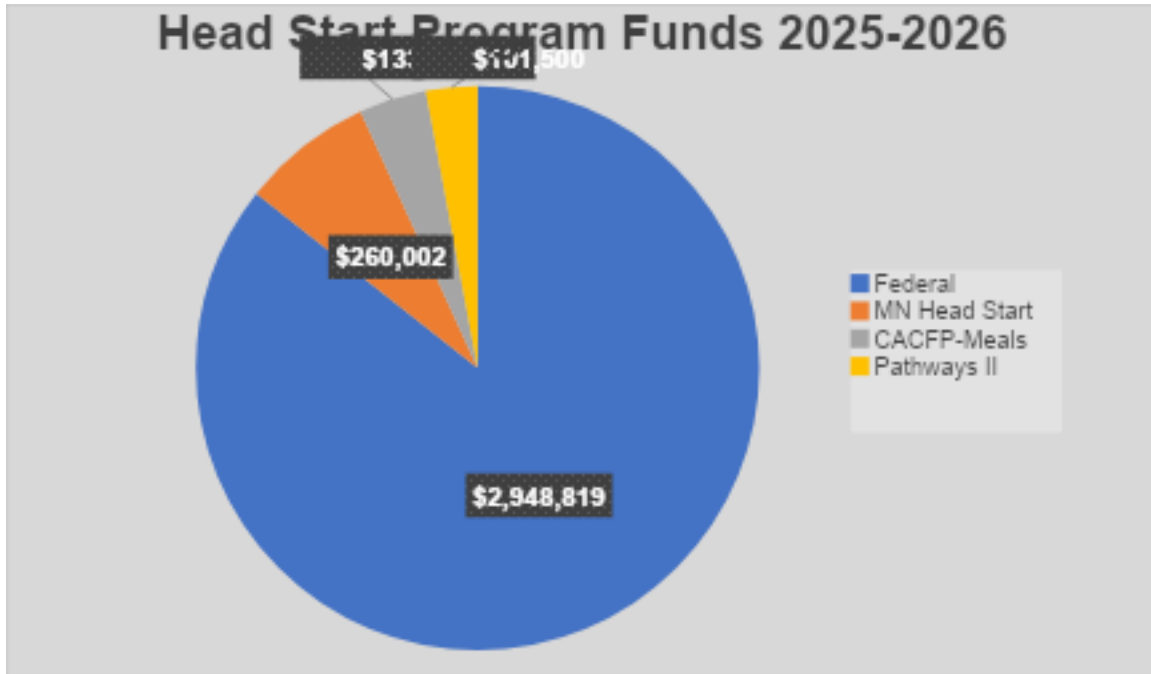


Enrollment 2025-2026



Fiscal

Head Start is primarily funded with federal funds, and our programs receive additional support from state and local dollars.



Federal Expenditure

Head Start Expenditures 2025-2026	Total
Personnel	\$1,776,680.94
Fringe Benefits	\$580,728.44
Travel/Travel-Out of Area/Vehicles	\$103,940.51
Consulting	\$250,535.39
Supplies	\$231,283.91
Training	\$38,069.00
Total	\$2,981,238.19

Audit

Our recent financial audit was completed on June 2, 2025. NWCA has implemented the Corrective Action Plan noted in the agency's audit, completed on August 31, 2025.

2024-001 Proposition of Journal Entries

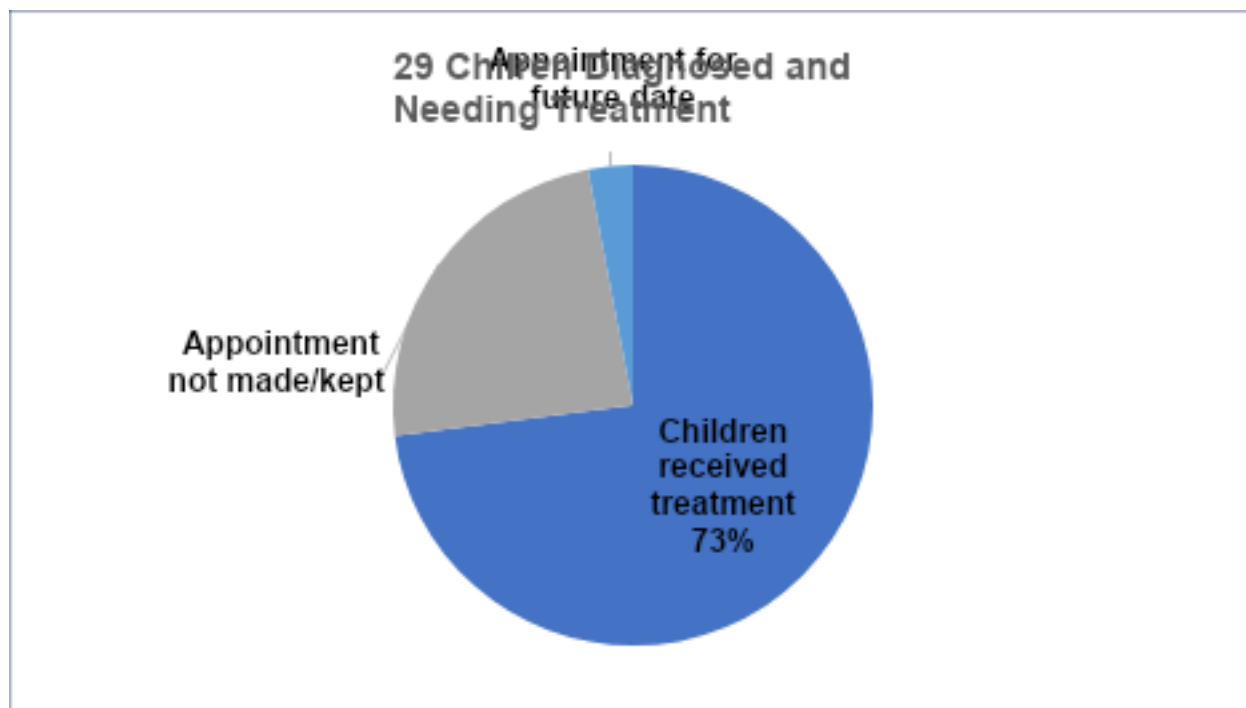
The Agency is required to maintain internal controls at a level where underlying support for general ledger accounts can be developed and a determination can be made that the general ledger accounts are properly reflected in accordance with GAAP.

2024-002 Reporting

Head Start requirements state that by the 30th calendar day following the end of each semi-annual period, each grantee must submit a SF-425, Federal Financial Report. The requirements also state that an annual SF-425 Federal Financial Report be submitted no later than 120 calendar days after the end of the project period.

Health

Our health-related services are well received by our families, with staff and community professionals collaborating to complete health and developmental screenings. During the screenings, children are assessed through dental, vision, hearing, and developmental screening tests designed to identify young children who may need additional support. When needed, children also receive physical examinations, lead and hemoglobin screenings, and immunizations as part of the health screening process. These comprehensive services help support children's overall health, development, and school readiness.



This year, 208 children received oral health preventive care, and 125 completed a professional oral health examination. Tracking the recommendations for dental care indicates that 24% of the children with an indication for treatment had not completed their appointment.

NWCA Head Start maintains strong health outcomes for enrolled children and families. Among children ages 3 to 5, 99% have health insurance, 100% have access to healthcare services, and 100% of families who elect immunizations are up to date. In addition, 98% of children are current on recommended preventive healthcare visits, and 28% have a diagnosed chronic health condition.

For children from birth to age 3, 97% have health insurance, 100% have access to healthcare services, and 86% of families who elect immunizations are up to date. Additionally, 94% of children are current on recommended preventive healthcare visits, and 3% have a documented chronic health condition. (NWCA 2025-2026 PIR Report)



Head Start supports children's oral health through both preventive services and education. Children learn healthy brushing and nutrition habits as part of daily classroom activities, while families receive resources and guidance to encourage good oral health practices at home. This combined approach helps build lifelong dental hygiene habits and promotes positive health outcomes for children.

School Readiness

NWCA Head Start promotes parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Head Start parents have many opportunities to participate in educational activities in their service area. Parents participated in our Policy Council, and knowledge, attendance, and participation grew with each meeting. Parents attend local parent meetings and work with their teacher and their child on home visits. Additionally, four parent conferences are held with each family throughout the year.

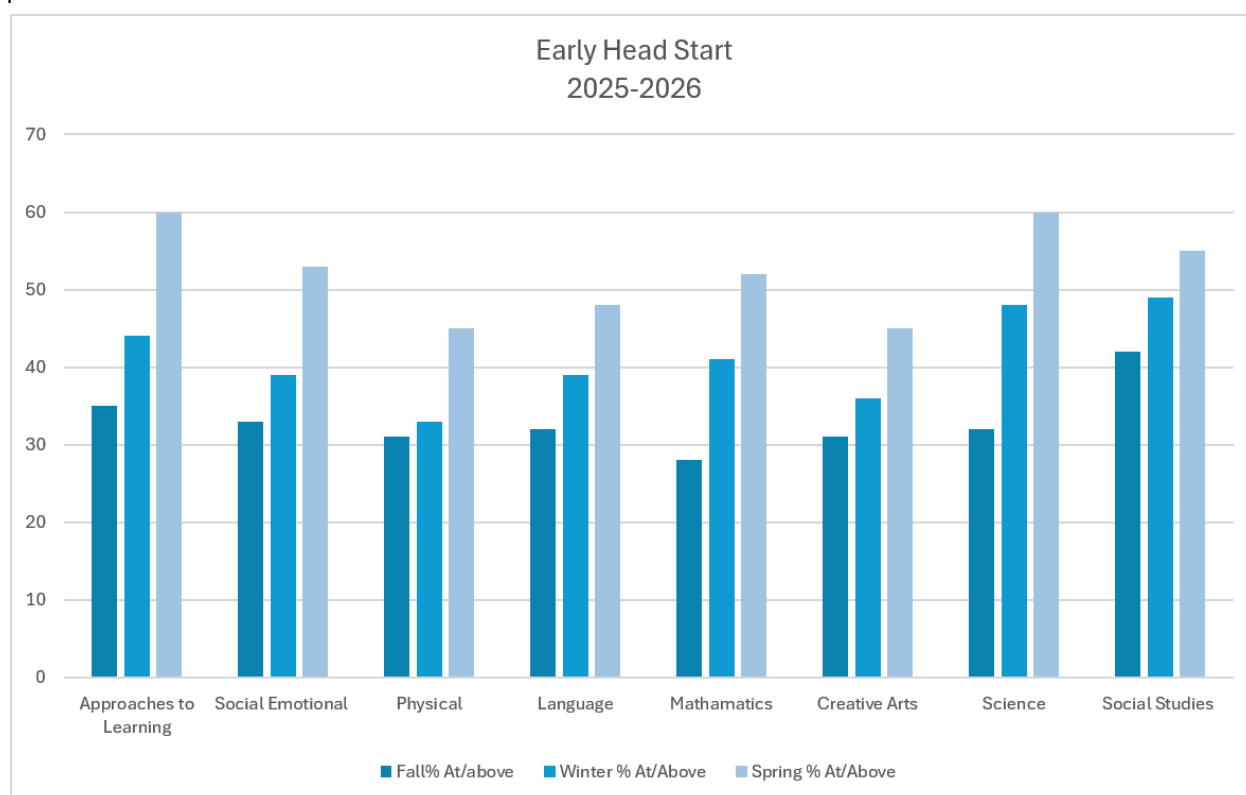
In Early Head Start, weekly (46 total) home visits of 1.5 hours are done with each enrolled child and a parent. The Busy Buddy socialization (22 total) is held twice a month for families in each local area, and activities, education, and information are provided for the children and parents. Parent engagement is emphasized, and literacy activities, budgeting education, mental health counseling, and crisis assistance are some parent support services that are provided.





Early Head Start continued to utilize the Child Observation Record Advantage (COR) for outcome and growth tracking. The Infant/Toddler COR assessments show strong developmental progress across all areas from fall to spring. In the fall, many children were still building early foundational skills. By winter, a majority of children were meeting expectations in most domains, and by spring, nearly all areas showed children growth at or above expectations.

Growth was especially strong in approaches to learning, mathematics, social emotional and science, highlighting steady skill development and readiness for preschool transitions.



Early Head Start teachers utilize COR Advantage to provide a complete picture of each child's development. COR Advantage allows teachers to observe children's development through play and naturally occurring activities.

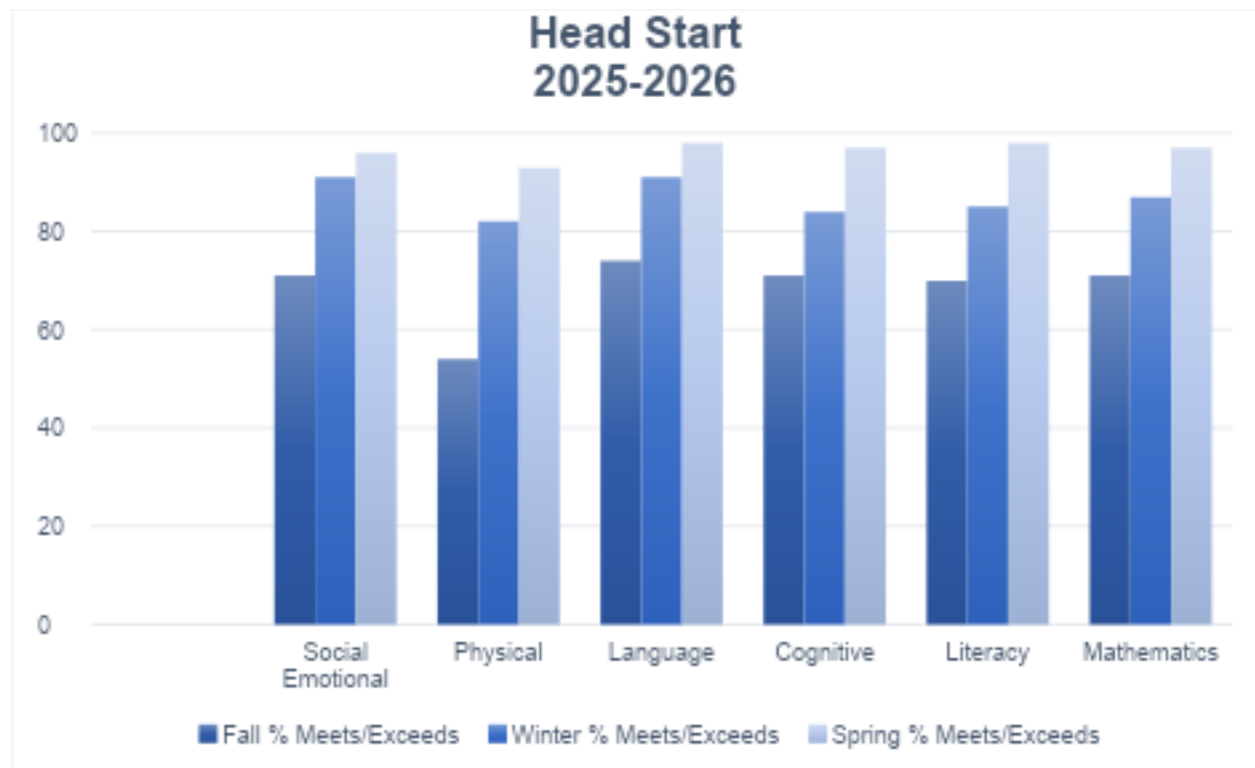




We continue our involvement in a project to aggregate child outcome data statewide using the Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG). The program documents child growth success and points to areas for improvement. The results will also help refine our efforts to optimize each child's development and transitions to kindergarten.

During each school year, communications occur with kindergarten teachers in each school district to review expectations and discuss transition experiences. Developmental growth and concerns are shared as appropriate. Memorandums of Agreement outlining transition activities and mutual school readiness goals are developed with each school district.

Overarching goals and the developmental growth of kindergarten-bound children are included below. The 2025-2026 preschool assessments demonstrate performance increased substantially from Fall to Spring in every area. The largest improvement occurred in Physical development. By spring, all areas were at 93% or higher, with Language and Literacy reaching 98%, with particularly strong gains in Physical Development. The chart indicates strong growth across all six developmental domains during the year.



This growth reflects meaningful progress throughout the school year, as children strengthened the critical social, cognitive, and academic skills essential for kindergarten readiness.

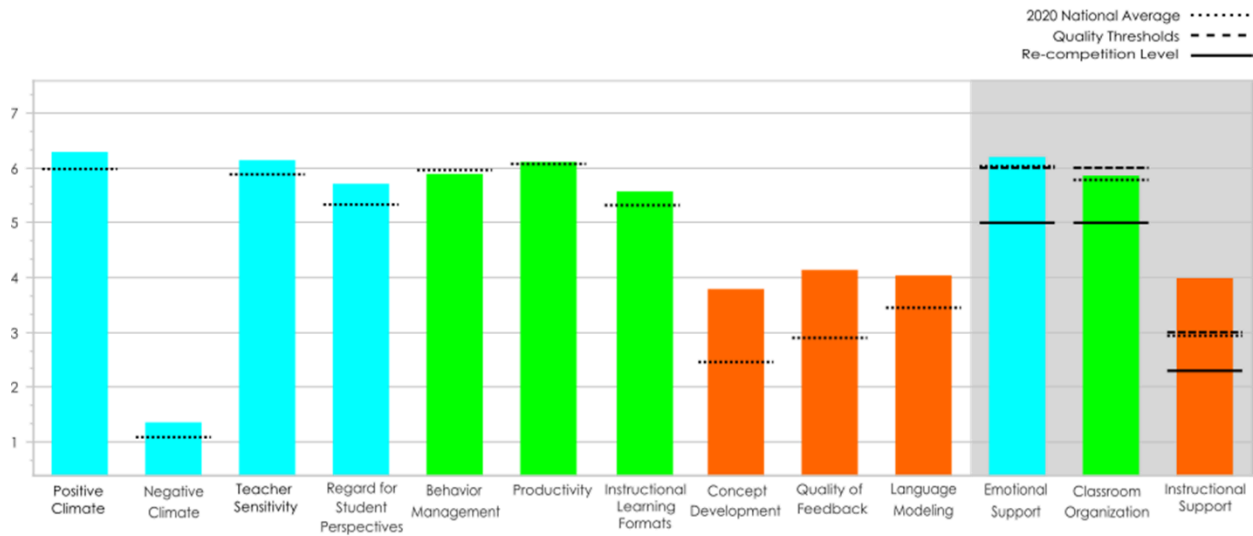
The consistent learning opportunities and ongoing support provided throughout the year contributed to children's continued development and preparation for a successful transition to kindergarten.

NWCA also participates in Minnesota Head Start Association (MNHSA) data collection and evaluation for School Readiness Outcomes. Participating with MHSA in this project provides information to showcase our efforts and identify areas of need. We analyze our assessment results across the state. For example, suppose a classroom shows higher or lower than average scores. In that case, we can compare across the state, dive deeper into our tools, classroom needs, and documentation, and act accordingly.

CLASS Observation and HOVRS provide teachers with constructive feedback and areas to focus on for training. Requests for Conscious Discipline and Mental Health training are examples of requests that have resulted from observations.



Northwest Community Action Head Start 2025-2026 CLASS Score Average



	PC	NC	TS	RSP	BM	PD	ILF	CD	QF	LM	ES	CO	IS
All Observations	6.29	1.36	6.14	5.71	5.89	6.11	5.57	3.79	4.14	4.04	6.2	5.86	3.99

School Readiness and Transitions

Home visitors supported five pregnant women this program year. The mother transitions to the parent role in Early Head Start while the baby becomes the enrollee. As EHS children turn three, they are transitioned into the Head Start center as space and eligibility allow.

Head Start supports the transition from the center to kindergarten. All children receive a summer packet of activity ideas for parent-child interactions, giving them a foundation for their Kindergarten experiences. Activities sent home include literacy, math, social, creative arts, fine motor, gross motor, and science exploration.

Head Start children visit the kindergarten classrooms in preparation for the next school year. Kindergarten teachers introduce themselves to the children throughout the year. They may speak to parents at spring parent meetings because the Head Starts in the cafeteria are eaten at the same time as the kindergarten. Hence, the Head Start children are familiar with the kindergarten teachers.

At 30 months, home visitors and parents develop a transition plan for each enrolled child. The Busy Buddy socializations are often held in our Head Start centers, which provides additional opportunities for children to visit and become comfortable in the classroom.



School Readiness Goal

Children will have an internal motivation to learn.

The office of Head Start defines school readiness as:

Children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success throughout their academic careers.

School Readiness Objectives:

80% of children will show growth in each indicated measure from Fall to Spring each program year, and 82% of children transitioning to kindergarten will meet MNHSA School Readiness target scores indicating Kindergarten Readiness.



School Readiness**Early Learning Outcome Framework**

Domain	Objectives
Approaches to Learning	Children will persist in tasks. Children will demonstrate initiative and independence. Child will show an interest in and curiosity about the world around them.
Social Emotional	Children will show an interest in, interact with, and develops personal relationships with other children. Children will show confidence in their own abilities through relationships with others. Children will express confidence in their own skills and positive feelings about self. Children will engage in and maintain positive interactions and relationships with other children.
Language/Literacy	Children initiate non-verbal communication and language to learn and gain information. Children understand and respond to increasingly complex communication and language from others.
Cognition	Children will actively explore people and objects to understand self, others, and objects. Children will ask questions, gather information, and make predictions.

Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development	Children will demonstrate healthy behaviors with increasing independence as part of everyday routines. Children will demonstrate knowledge of personal safety practices and routines.
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Policy Council

Parent engagement is a cornerstone of NWCA Head Start. Each site holds parent committee meetings, which give families opportunities to share input, plan activities, and stay connected to their child's learning. Representatives from these committees are elected to serve on the Policy Council, ensuring that parent voices guide program decision-making.

This year's Policy Council is made up of 8 elected Head Start parents who work in partnership with program management. Together, they review and provide input on budgets, program planning, policies, and community partnerships. Policy Council members also help strengthen connections between families and local communities by sharing feedback and encouraging participation.

Family Engagement



Our program facilitates events that are planned by families, for families. These events consist of busy buddies for Early Head Start that are offered twice a month, field trips, and parent meetings four times a year for every family involved in our program. Families are invited to attend and volunteer during these events and to participate in our Policy Council. The Policy Council had 8 active members in this program year. There were 218 volunteers in our program. Some activities conducted include birdhouse making, garden centers, and visiting farms, firehouses, and pumpkin patches.





Head Start Testimonials

Head start has not just shaped my life; it IS my life! Head Start is truly my reason why and has guided my journey through every stage:

The Student: My own teacher inspired my dream to work with children.

The Professional: I earned my bachelor's degree to intentionally build my career here. For a decade I have lived my dream as a teacher, home visitor, and now Family Services Manager.

The Mom: I experienced the impact firsthand through home visits and the classroom with my own son.

Head Start is my career, my support system, and I am exactly where I was always meant to be. I am so proud of the work I do and love going to work every day.

Jackie Stinson - Family Services Manager

As a Head Start parent, my kids were learning so much from being in the Head Start program. Head Start helped potty train both of my kids which I struggled with prior at home. That was a huge win for our family. Their teachers and staff were wonderful and very personable. They were making a difference for not only my children, but the rest of the children in the classroom. I wanted to be part of that success. Here I am, 3+ years in, and cannot see myself doing anything but this.

Jessica Wensloff-Assistant Teacher

Five years ago, our family's journey began with Early Head Start. Since then, all three of my daughters have been enrolled in Head Start in Viking. Our entire family has been involved and has truly loved both programs and the teachers! Last school year was our final year as an enrolled family. I love this program and the way the teachers and advocates truly care for and support families.

Wanting to stay a part of that incredible mission, I accepted a position to work directly in the Head Start classroom!

EHS and HS did not just help my daughters prepare for school and grow socially; it gave me a new, meaningful career. I am so happy to continue being a part of the Head Start family.

Adrianna Hewitt-Head Start Parent