



2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT



Early
Learning
Academies

Head
Start
Programs



Serving:
New Hanover County

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WE ARE ELA

Early Learning Academies

HEAD START LOCATIONS

EXCEL 2: 4308 S 17TH ST

EXCEL THREE: 165 VISION DR

"Early Learning Academies is here to deliver every child a joyful, caring, and engaging early education experience that will make a way to fulfill the promise of his or her life. We warmly welcome childcare centers into our community that put children first by enhancing their resources and opportunities while honoring the history and uniqueness of every center."

Jane Delaney, Chief Operating Officer



Curriculum

By combining philosophies, from Montessori, Reggio, Vygotsky, Piaget, Gardner and more, the ELA Curriculum reaches each child's unique learning styles and educational journey. We strive to build strong foundations for lifelong learning.

What We Do...

Early Learning Academies' centers deliver EVERY CHILD a joyful, caring, and engaging childcare experience that will pave the way for all children to fulfill the promise of their life. We believe EACH CHILD IS UNIQUE and ALL CHILDREN ARE RESPECTED for their differences.

Core values

- We hold ourselves to the highest standards of excellence in everything we do.
- We emulate kindness and integrity with our words and our actions.
- We are always learning to better serve our families and each other.
- We welcome all into our classrooms and onto our teams.
- We are not a place, we are a Community.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Office of Head Start Priorities

- Funding issues remain front-and-center, with pressures from a tight labor market as well as a challenging political climate presenting significant concerns for the next two years.
- Eligibility remains a challenge, although recent changes in the new Head Start rule along with eligibility for families qualified for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have improved local program flexibility.
- Trauma continues to have a deep and wide-ranging impact on Head Start children and families. Children are presenting significant needs and increased signs of trauma. In addition, the high percentage of children with disabilities or developmental needs impacts the classroom environment.
- State pre-K continues to expand in many states. While we support high-quality early learning opportunities for all children, the Head Start community also recognizes that many children need the additional supports provided by the Head Start model in order to achieve success. There remains a crippling shortage of high-quality infant and toddler care as embodied in the Early Head Start model.

Program Priorities

Program priorities focus on ensuring ongoing compliance with fiscal practices and policies, while implementing integrated systems that enhance navigation and delivery of center-based services for children and families impacted by trauma and high-risk factors.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW



Our program is funded by the Office of Head Start and delivers comprehensive early childhood services through a center-based approach. The program serves children from six weeks of age through school entry at five years old, operating across the Excel location buildings to ensure accessible, high-quality care and education.

Using a dual-generation approach, the program supports both children and families by promoting healthy child development while strengthening family well-being. Services are designed to prepare children for school success through developmentally appropriate learning experiences, while also empowering parents with education, resources, and support. The overarching goal is to nurture children's readiness for school and encourage family self-sufficiency through strong partnerships, family engagement, and coordinated services.

116

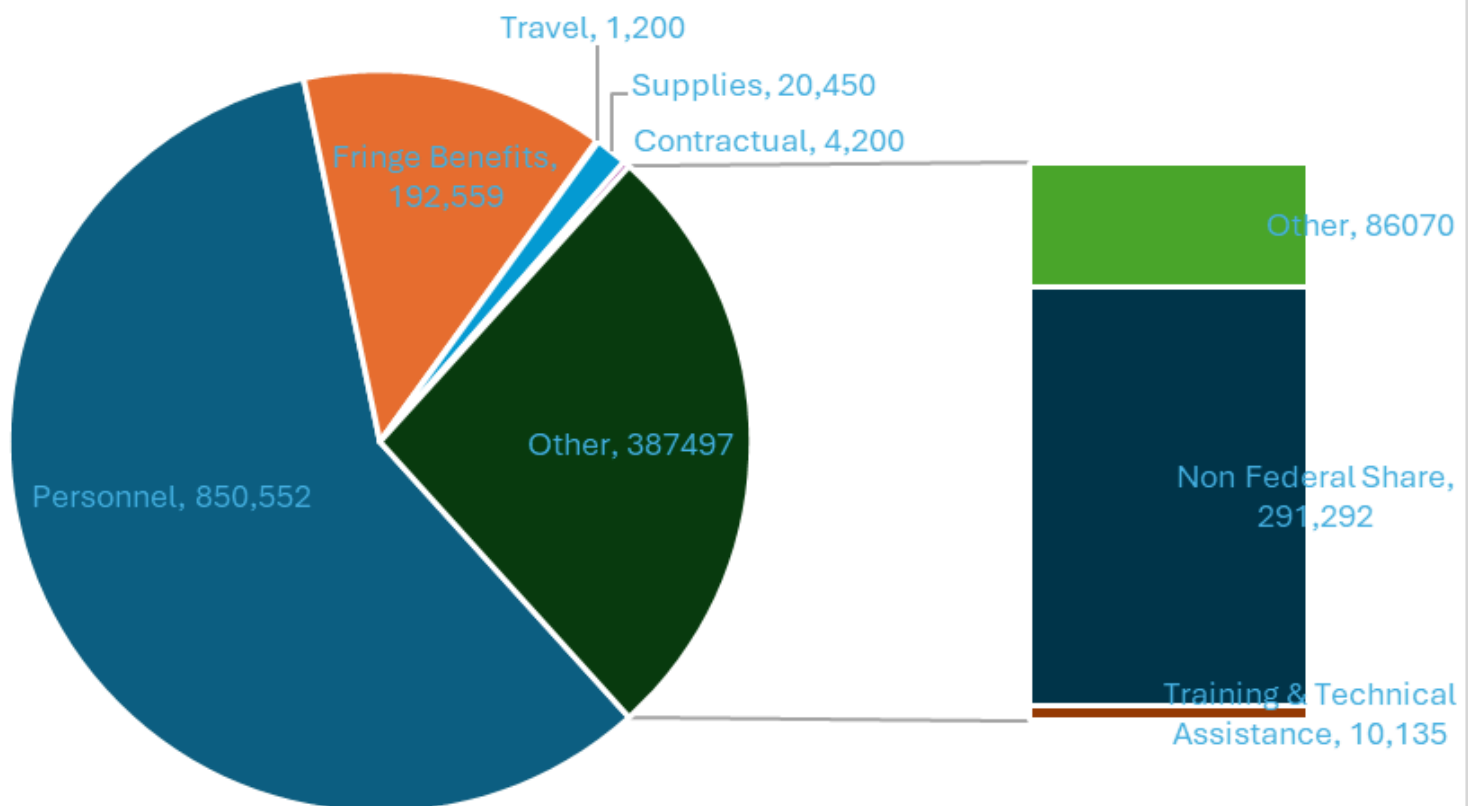
Head Start Slots
Three years old- five
years old

72

Early Head Start
Slots 6weeks -
Three years old

BUDGET

APPROVED BUDGET



FUNDING CYCLE: 05/01/2024-04/30/2025



COMMUNITY NEEDS

According to the U.S.Census, in New Hanover County, an estimated 1,700 children under the age of five live in low-income or high-risk households.

Currently, the program serves 188 children, representing only 11% of the identified need. As a result, approximately 89% (1,512 children) and families who could benefit from trauma-informed, center-based services could potentially not be receiving the high-quality care in the area. Increased investment to ensure vulnerable children and families access to critical early intervention and support services during the most formative years of development is necessary.



New Hanover County, North Carolina

Did You Know?

“Early intervention during the first five years has been shown to significantly reduce long-term educational, health, and social costs.”

DIRECTORS NOTE



As we enter our second year of service in New Hanover County, Head Start and Early Head Start continue to establish strong roots while remaining responsive to the needs of a community we are still getting to know. Early Head Start marked an important expansion of our services, allowing us to support children and families at even earlier stages of development and to promote equitable access to high-quality care and educational opportunities from the very beginning of life.

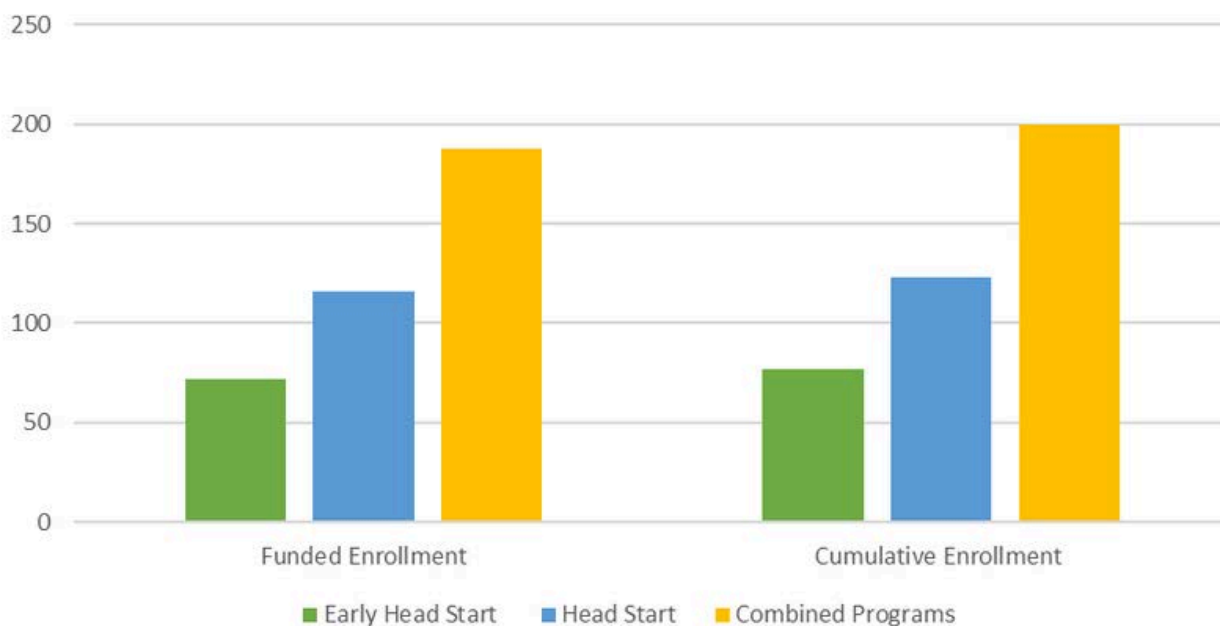
Anchored in the Head Start Way, our work is guided by a deeply family-centered approach that honors families as partners and children's first teachers. We strive to create meaningful connections between school and home, recognizing that children thrive when learning is supported across all environments. This vision is carried forward by a committed team of professionals who bring dedication, compassion, and a genuine eagerness to grow alongside the families we serve. Together, we remain focused on strengthening early learning systems and fostering positive outcomes for children, families, and the broader New Hanover County community.

Netalia Dunn, Director

ENROLLMENT & ELIGIBILITY

ERSEA recruitment and selection practices prioritized families with the greatest needs in alignment with Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Program Enrollment Overview



Eligibility



- Public Assist.: 108 (62%)
- Homeless: 43 (25%)
- Below 100%: 15 (9%)
- Over Income: 6 (3%)
- Foster: 3 (2%)
- 100 < 130%: 0 (0%)
- Blank: 0 (0%)



Success Story 1: Inclusive Placement for a Child with Physical Disabilities

One family faced significant challenges in securing an early childhood placement for their child due to physical disabilities and the need for specialized equipment. Several programs were unable to accommodate the child's limitations or provide the necessary space and support. After learning about Early Head Start, the child's mother reached out and was able to successfully enroll her child in the program. Through individualized planning and collaboration across program areas, the child was welcomed into a supportive learning environment where accommodations could be made to meet his needs. Enrollment in the program provided the child with access to early education opportunities and allowed his mother the reassurance that her child was included, supported, and valued.

-Head Start Compliance Manager



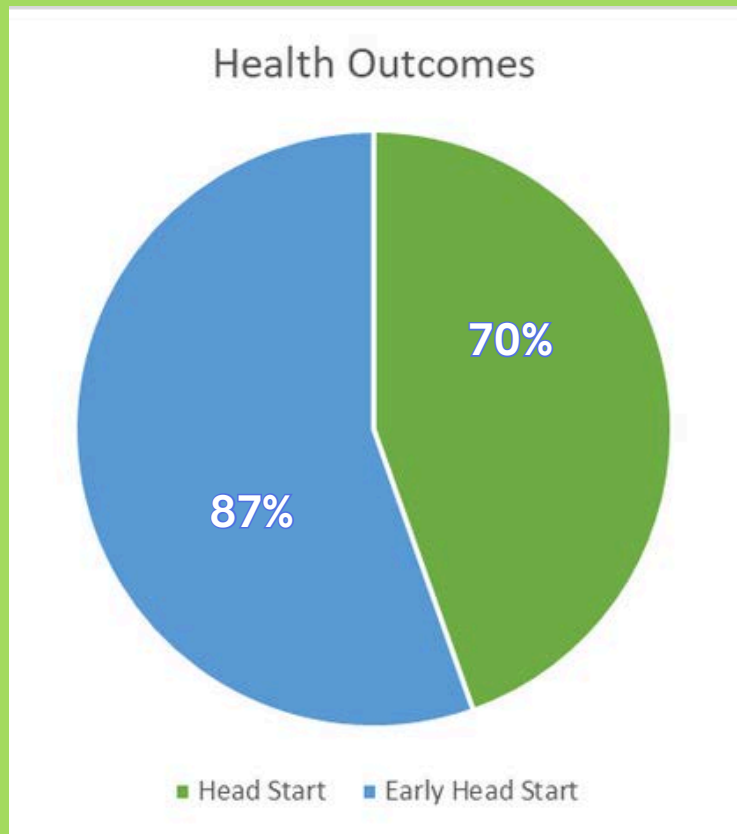
Success Story 2: Access Through Community Partnerships

Strong partnerships with community agencies played a vital role in connecting families to Early Head Start and Head Start services. Through collaboration with local organizations, families were referred for enrollment who may not have otherwise been aware of the program. Once enrolled, families were supported in accessing additional community resources and education-based services, including connections to IFSPs and IEPs when developmental concerns were identified. These collaborative efforts ensured that children received comprehensive support beyond the classroom, strengthening family outcomes and promoting school readiness through early identification and coordinated services.

-Head Start Compliance Manager



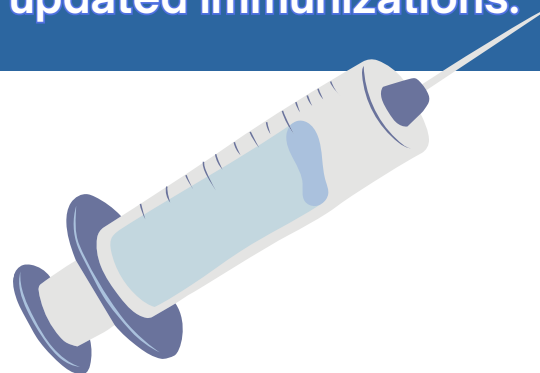
MEDICAL & DENTAL



**Head Start
70 %**

**Early Head
Start
87%**

As part of the program's two-generation approach, families work collaboratively with Head Start staff to identify, set, and achieve health-related goals. 87% of Early Head Start and 70% of Head Start families have completed medical and dental physical while also receiving their updated immunizations.

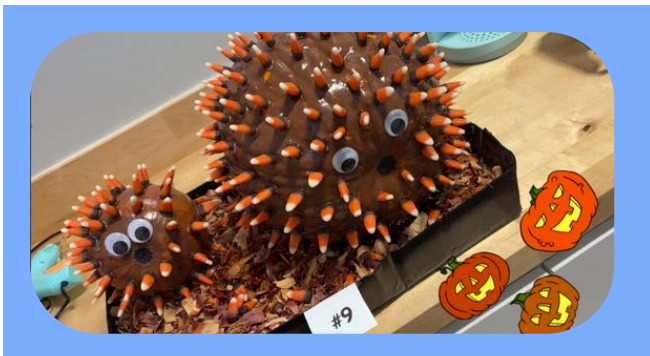


FAMILY & COMMUNITY

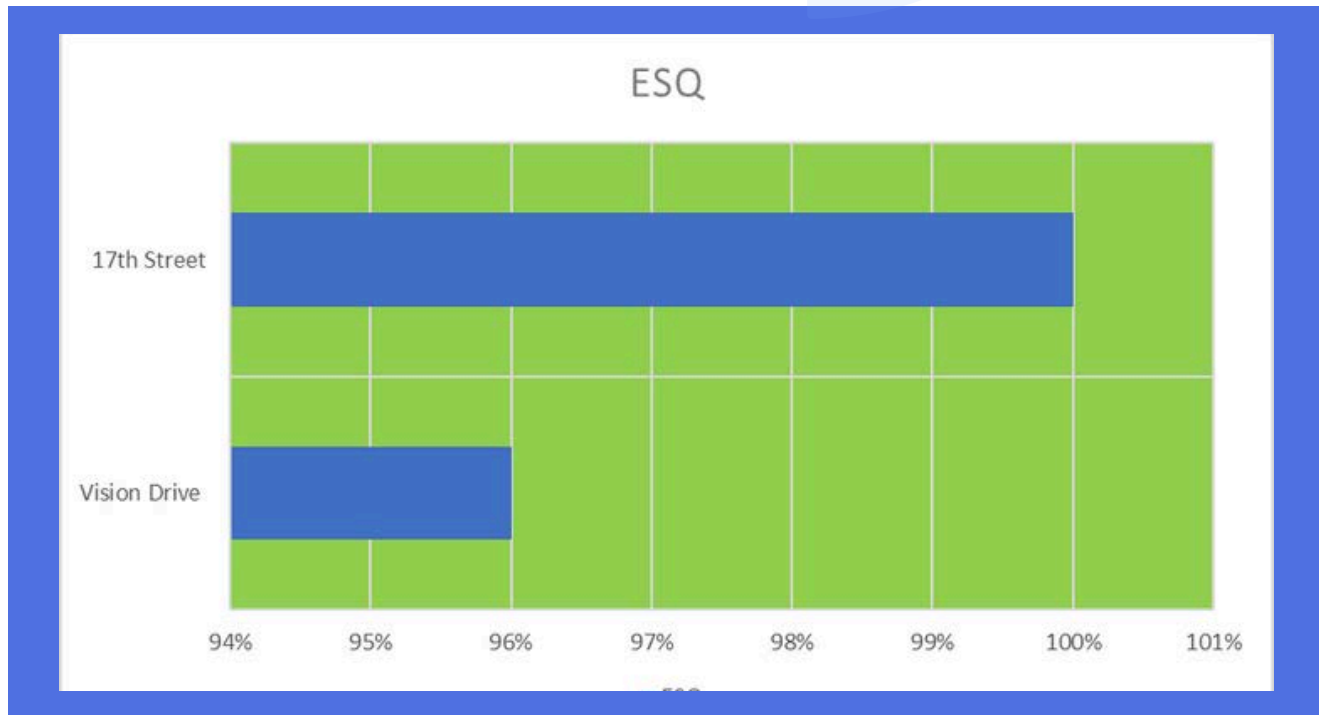
Family and Community Engagement is a core component of our Head Start program, designed to build strong, respectful partnerships with families and community stakeholders. We actively involve families as their children's first teachers through ongoing communication, goal-setting, family activities, and access to resources that support child development and family well-being. By collaborating with local agencies, schools, and service providers, we strengthen connections that enhance comprehensive services, promote family resilience, and support positive outcomes for children and families.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Nourish NC Food Distribution
- Pumpkin Decorating Contest
- Clothing/Food Drive



FAMILY SUCCESS



Head Start uses an environmental screening questionnaire to help identify potential environmental health risks that may impact a child's health, safety, and development

At four years old, this student has shown remarkable resilience after experiencing the loss of his mother before being enrolled in the head start program. Over the past year, he has been supported through consistent routines, nurturing relationships, and a trauma-informed classroom environment that helped him feel safe and ready to learn. With the support of ongoing therapy alongside his father, this student has made meaningful progress in his social-emotional development, communication, and classroom participation. As he prepares to transition to kindergarten next year, he is showing increased confidence and curiosity. The family has also received support with clothing, food, and holiday assistance, helping to ease daily stressors. The child's father has shared his gratitude for the program, noting the stability and care it has provided during a difficult time and the positive impact it has had on his son's growth and well-being. From receiving to paying it forward, Dad continues to engage in the classroom and by giving back to others in need by donating clothing items to our program

-Head Start Family & Community Engagement Manager . .



**SUCCESS
STORIES**

PROGRAM MEASURES



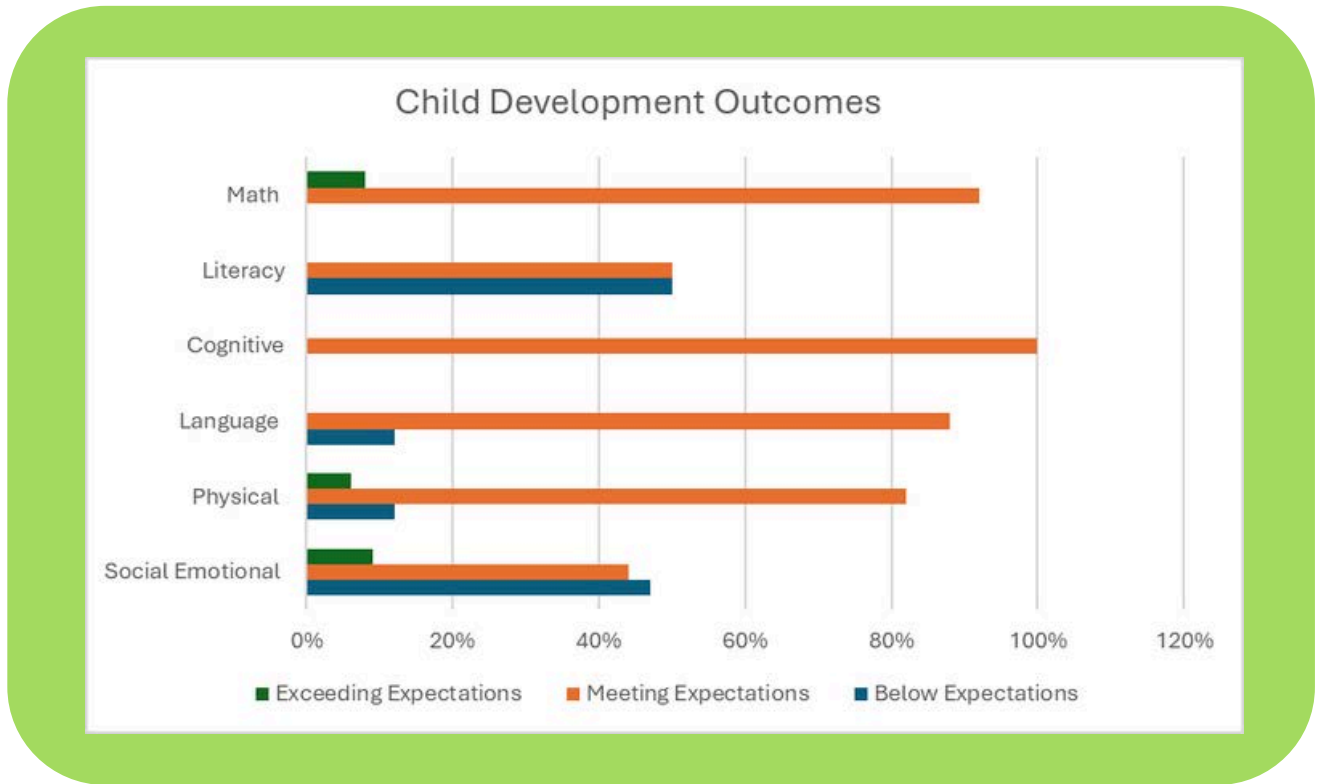
- 86% of classrooms will score within quality thresholds for initial CLASS Assessment
- Staff will support parents in maintaining and attending scheduled visits at a rate of 88%
- The program will provide 6 parent engagement opportunities during the year
- The program will identify partner agencies and develop working agreements for the collaboration of services

CHALLENGE

As a newly established program, we face several community-level challenges that may impact the achievement of our program goals. Building strong and effective community partnerships takes time, particularly in a service area with limited resources and few established early childhood support systems. In addition, ongoing training and professional development are essential to support staff growth and ensure consistent implementation of high-quality practices, including achieving quality thresholds on initial CLASS assessments across classrooms. Staff also work to support families in maintaining scheduled medical, dental, and other required visits, which can be challenging due to transportation barriers, limited provider availability, and competing family priorities. Providing meaningful parent engagement opportunities requires intentional outreach and trust-building with families who may be new to structured early childhood programs.

CHILD OUTCOMES

Tracking child outcomes is essential for teachers to understand each child's developmental progress, strengths, and areas needing support. Ongoing documentation helps teachers plan intentional, individualized instruction and adjust daily services to meet children's needs.



Two NCPK Lead teachers who share dually enrolled Head Start classrooms have actively participated in CLASS assessments and demonstrated ongoing growth through coaching and professional development. Through reflection and openness to feedback, these teachers have strengthened their instructional practices, increased flexibility with classroom procedures, and enhanced intentional interactions with children. Their willingness to adapt routines and try new strategies has contributed to smoother transitions, more responsive classroom environments, and stronger collaboration with Head Start partners. This growth supports positive child outcomes and the overall effectiveness of the classroom team.

-Head Start Education Team

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Collaborating with community agencies is essential to supporting the whole child and family. Strong partnerships allow programs to connect families with additional resources such as health services, mental health supports, early intervention, and family assistance programs. Through collaboration, teachers and staff can better understand family needs, coordinate services, and reduce gaps in support. Working together with community agencies strengthens continuity of care, promotes equity, and ensures children and families receive timely, comprehensive services that contribute to positive outcomes.

