

action pact

Head Start

2023-2024 Annual Report



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AGENCY MISSION

Our mission is big. We strive to create equal opportunity by prioritizing progress over programs.

We strive to create equal opportunity by prioritizing progress over programs. To succeed, our staff of nearly 400 have to work as one team moving toward a common goal. This requires strong, diverse, and passionate leaders.

OUR PACT

We draw strength from our past and focus our energy on an even stronger future. With action pact's help, our communities will be full of neighbors who can support their families, boost their education, and have a meaningful impact.

Board Chairman:	Leonard Burse
Vice Chairman:	Synita Mathis
Treasurer:	Cathy Benton
Secretary:	Gloria Paulk

Board Members: Rose Bailey, Ethelyn Creech, , Dawn Garcia, Michael Garvin, Walter C. Gibson, Michael-Angelo James, Bobby Kennedy, Bernita Lewis, Lee Lewis, Marcus McCray, Linda McDuffie, Dr. Kim Morgan, Anthony Simmons, Tina Smith, Jo Ann Strickland, James A. Thomas, Sr., and Clarence Washington.

Ex-Officio Member: Sierra Eason

Together we can solve setbacks.

America was built on the promise that every family should have an opportunity for success.

Action pact is committed to this promise.

action pact

SAY GOODBYE TO JUST GETTING BY.....

The Head Start Goal Statement

Action pact's Head Start/Early Head Start Program will provide quality teaching and learning environments to meet the developmental needs of all children to ensure future educational success. To accomplish this goal, all Head Start Learning Centers will meet or exceed the requirements of the Federal Head Start Program Standards and maintain Quality Rating Standards.

The School Readiness mission of action pact Head Start/Early Head Start is to partner with families and communities to work together to plan, coordinate, and improve services for all children. Head Start/Early Head Start provides all eligible children opportunities to participate in early childhood programs that enable them to enter school with the skills, behaviors, and family support necessary for them to progress and succeed. **Action pact** also enhances the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services.

From the Desk of the Executive Director



Action pact is a community action agency proudly serving families and communities in more than 40 Georgia counties. We are dedicated to the promise of helping individuals and communities thrive by providing services that support our vision of strong, self-sufficient families and individuals living in healthy, supportive communities. We remain committed to serving families through our Head Start program because we understand the important role Head Start plays in strengthening families by creating a supportive, holistic environment for parents and their children.

A Message from the Head Start Director

Action pact's Head Start program continues to thrive. We take pride in knowing that 835 infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families are being served with high-quality, comprehensive services. Head Start promotes child development, good health practices, healthy eating habits, mental well-being, disabilities, and exceptionalities inclusive classrooms, family engagements, male involvements, school readiness goals, transition and family services. Above all other services, we hold safety and supervision as top priority. Our program eagerly welcomes our parents, extended family, community, and collaborative partners to visit our centers and make a difference in the lives of the children. Through our services rendered, communities are fortified physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. We encourage each person who has a passion for helping others to come and join our mission, by volunteering your services to our community, Head Start and Early Head Start.





Private Funds Received/Budgetary Expenditures

Action pact Head Start received funds from the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families on November 6, 2023.

Below is the Non-Competing Continuation Funding chart of funds that were received. The first portion of the funds were received on November 6, 2023, and the balance of the funds was received on April 16, 2024.

Regular Budget	
	Head Start /Early Head Start
Program Operations	\$12,081,929
T/TA	Head Start: \$54,360; Early Head Start: 89,710
Non-Federal Share	\$3,056,500
Total	\$15,282,499

There will be a COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) increase available for fiscal year 2024. Early Head Start funds will total \$159,941 and Head Start funds will total \$123,984. These funds have not yet been received, however, after combining the total sum will be \$283,925.

Ware and Coffee Head Start have a total of four Pre-K classrooms. Three at Ware and one at Coffee. **Action Pact** received separate funding from the Department of Early Care and Learning. The payments were received once per month from August 2023 through May of 2024.

Action Pact also received funds from the Department of Early Care and Learning for Child and Adult Care Food Program. These funds are used to provide meals to the Early Head Start and Head Start enrollees. Local school board decisions to increase food costs on contracts has impacted the program's food budget.

Proposed Budget for the FY 2025

Action pact plans to apply for annual funding from the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The funds will be utilized for program operations to serve 515 Head Start children and 320 Early Head Start children from November 1, 2024-October 31, 2025. Training and technical assistance funds will be applied to train staff, the governing board, and the policy council.

The table reflects the proposed amounts that will be applied for:

Funding Type	Head Start	Early Head Start
Program Operations	\$5,399,902	\$6,965,952
Training and Technical Assistance	\$54,360	\$89,710
Total Funding	\$12,509,924	

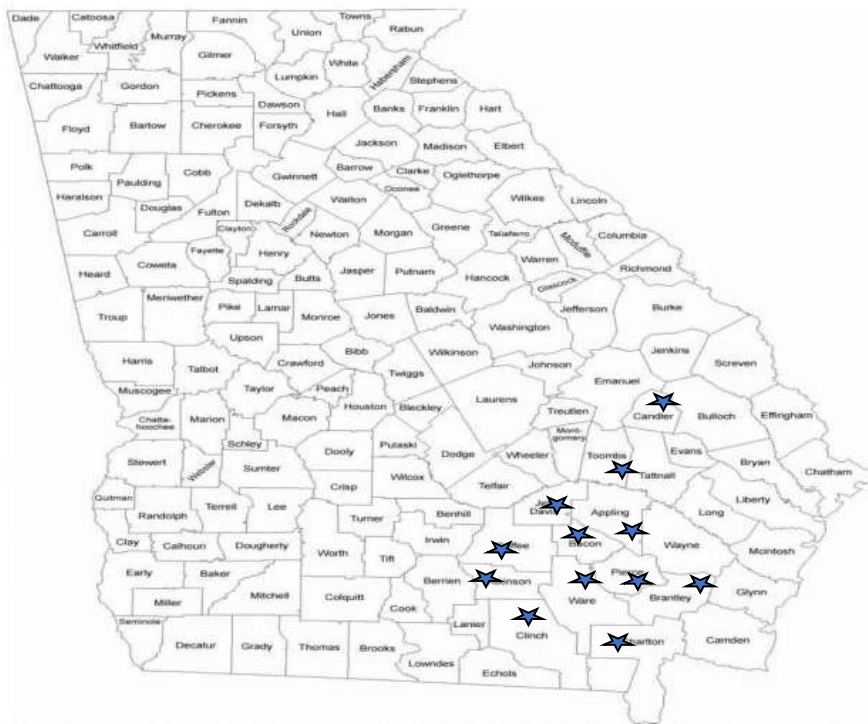
This past year we converted several Head Start classrooms to Early Head Start classrooms. Our waitlist for Early Head Start services continues to increase.

Action pact will also apply for \$369,942.80 from the Department of Early Care and Learning. The funds will be used to serve 80 Pre-K children in Ware and Coffee Counties from August 2024 to May of 2025.

Action pact plans to apply for CACFP funds to provide meals for the Head Start and Early Head Start children during the 2024-2025 program year. The funding amount requested ranges from \$600,00 - \$900,000 depending on food cost at the time of the application.

Total Number of Children & Families Served

Action pact Head Start operates Head Start, Early Head Start and Pre-K programs in twelve counties in rural Southeast Georgia, with a total of 16 sites during the 2023-2024 program year. Comprehensive services were provided to 320 Early Head Start infants, toddlers, and/or expectant families. In addition, we served 515 Head Start pre-school (ages 3-4) children and families, of which 80 children (4-year-olds) received Georgia state lottery funded Pre-K/Head Start blended services.



*The areas marked with a star indicates **action pact**. Head Start program's service*

County	EHS Classrooms	EHS Funded Slots	HS Classrooms	HS Funded Slots
Appling	3	24	1	17
Atkinson	3	24	2	34
Bacon	3	24	2	33
Brantley	1	8	2	33
Candler	3	24	1	17
Charlton	2	16	2	34
Clinch	2	16	1	17
Coffee	2	16	4	68
Jeff Davis	0	0	2	32
Pierce	2	16	2	31
Toombs	2	16	3	54
Ware	17 (HH: 10; Ware: 7)	136	8 (HH: 1; Ware: 7)	145
Totals	40	320	30	515

Below is the monthly enrollment for the 2023-2024 program year and the percentage of eligible children served. Full enrollment for Head Start is 515 and full enrollment for Early Head Start is 320. Due to staff shortages, we were not able to open all the classrooms as planned. We increased by 105 enrollees from August to May.

Month	Head Start Enrollment	Percentage of Head Start Funded Enrollment	Early Head Start Enrollment	Percentage of Early Head Start Funded Enrollment
Aug 2023	359	83%	145	80%
Sep 2023	378	83%	150	78%
Oct 2023	392	83%	158	78%
Nov 2023	409	83%	175	79%
Dec 2023	419	84%	184	80%
Jan 2024	433	84%	209	82%
Feb 2024	454	85%	217	82%
Mar 2024	459	85%	222	82%
Apr 2024	464	85%	226	82%
May 2024	464	85%	228	82%

Results of the Most Recent Review/Financial Audit

The annual agency audit was conducted by McNair, McLemore, Middlebrooks, & Company. The agency audit report is available online at the Federal Audit Clearinghouse, fac.gov. For the Year Ending October 31, 2023, McNair, McLemore, Middlebrooks, & Company issued an unmodified opinion. There were no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies identified for the federal awards. There was one significant deficiency identified in the financial statements regarding the new lease standard. The finding was corrected with an accounting adjustment.

Federal Review

From January 23, 2023, to January 25, 2023, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted a Focus Area One (FA1) monitoring review of **action pact**, Inc. Head Start and Early Head Start programs. There were no areas of concern, no areas of noncompliance, and no deficiencies.

Program Operation

The program operates a full year, full day, center-based option in which the children attend the program 6.25 hours per day. Pre-K children attend for an extended stay from 7:45 a.m. - 2:45 p.m. Center calendars are based on the local public school board calendars. The Early Head Start Program also operates a center-based program, and children attend for additional days during the summer months. We offered a longer day for Early Head Start this year which will be more helpful for our teen parents and will continue this schedule in the upcoming year. Action pact is funded for **37** Early Head Start classrooms and **29** Head Start classrooms. There are **16** Head Start/Early Head Start centers in **12** counties and one Head Start administration office located in Waycross.

In Remembrance

This past year, Sgt. Kennedy Sanders was one of the active military personnel that lost her life. She was not only a Waycross native but had attended our Head Start program. Her teacher, Lundi Cobb, still works with action pact as an Early Head Start teacher. We were privileged to have Sgt. Sanders' mother and family visit the Ware County Head Start Center as staff made a presentation to the family. Thank you for your service Sgt. Sanders.



Staff of the Year



Congratulations to Alaycia Staten, Ware County Head Start Center Coordinator, for being named Staff of the Year for the 2023-2024 program year. Ms. Staten has been with the program since 2016 and has served in numerous positions, including Teacher, Pre-K Teacher, as well as a Coach, prior to becoming Center Coordinator this past year.

Program Planning

Each year, the leadership team, program staff, Policy Council and Governing Board review and update the Head Start program's short and long-term goals to ensure that the best quality services are being provided to the children and families we serve. Goals for the 2023-2024 Program Year were as follows:

<u>Short Term Goals:</u>	<u>Long Term Goals:</u>
Strive for zero supervision or safety incidents	Add multi-purpose rooms at each center that doesn't currently have one
Maintain Quality Rating at all centers	
Strive for at least 1,500 volunteers in EHS, HS, and Pre-K combined	
Have at least 30% of families in a family partnership	
Conduct CLASS observations on all EHS classrooms at least once per program year	
CLASS Certification for all Center Coordinators	
25% of Head Start & Pre-K classrooms will have all greens on CLASS observations	
Full enrollment in Early Head Start and Head Start for the program year	
Meet the required in-kind goal	
Maintain a waitlist for Early Head Start of at least 150 and a waitlist of at least 75 for Head Start	
Less than 10% of Head Start staff turnover	
Fill open positions within 2 weeks or less	

Quality Rated

During the 2023-2024 school year, **action pact's** 16 sites continued the Quality Rated process with several centers starting the re-assessment process. Centers going through Quality Rating received additional monies through the Department of Early Care and Learning. These funds enabled the program to purchase additional items for the classrooms to help ensure they met the material requirements of Quality Rating. Additional funds were also received for on-line training with the Branaugh Group. Additionally, the staff at centers that scored 2 or 3 Stars were eligible for a \$500 bonus from Quality Rated.

At the time of the last Annual Report, we were awaiting the results for Coffee, Pierce and Ware. Three centers had their reassessments during the year: Bacon at ABC, Jeff Davis and Toombs. Three centers are scheduled to be reassessed during the 2024-2025 program year (Bacon Northside, Candler and Clinch). At this time, we have been informed that those previously additional funds are no longer available for purchasing needed items. The program is sponsored by the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). Below are the current levels of our centers.

Appling	3 Stars
Atkinson – Pearson	2 Stars
Atkinson – Willacoochee	3 Stars
Bacon Northside	3 Stars
Bacon Southside	2 Stars
Bacon at ABC	3 Stars - increased from 2 Stars
Brantley HS	2 Stars
Candler	3 Stars
Charlton	3 Stars – increased from 1 Star
Clinch	2 Stars
Coffee	2 Stars
Hazzard EHS	3 Stars – increased from 2 Stars
Jeff Davis	3 Stars
Pierce	3 Stars
Toombs	3 Stars - increased from 2 Stars
Ware	2 Stars

Nutrition

We continue to work to provide nutritious and tasty meals for the children in our program. Through our partnership with WayGreen, we were able to provide a number of fresh fruit and vegetables items this past year. These items were all from local farms, which use only organic materials. Children loved these fresh options, and we hope to continue to add these items when available.



All centers, where food is “dipped,” have at least one staff member who is ServSafe certified. A new kitchen, which is part of the Coffee County Head Start expansion, is underway and we hope it will be completed during the upcoming program year. The “food truck” at Clinch was able to provide all the

meals at the center this year which has been a wonderful addition for the center, previously food had to be brought in from another center.

The lunchrooms for Appling, Clinch, Toombs and Ware was recognized as part of the ECE Farmer Champion Program. Each site was awarded a stipend to assist with the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables and was later recognized by the state.



Monitoring and Self-Assessment

On March 20, 2024, the leadership team met, and self-assessment training was conducted. Checklists were developed as well as focus questions and items that would be monitored. Team leaders were able to include parents, board members and other staff members on their teams to assist with the self-assessment. Most of the teams visited centers the week of April 8th. The leadership team met on April 19th to review their preliminary findings.

The self-assessment reports from each component area were submitted to the Training Specialist on April 26, 2024. The Training Specialist completed the self-assessment summary and findings report and submitted it to the Head Start Director. The information in that report is a summary of the Head Start program strengths and weaknesses, and if needed, a plan of action was created.

The self-assessment summary is reviewed with the Policy Council and the Governing Board. The Governing Board and Policy Council have the opportunity to ask questions regarding the findings and share any input for improvements during meetings.

All centers were monitored twice during the year by Bright from the Start State Licensing. Each center was monitored extensively by the Head Start Administrative Team and the Center Coordinators at least monthly. Additionally, the Head Start program's Pre-K classrooms were monitored by Bright from the Start Pre-K and the Head Start program was monitored by the Bright from the Start CACFP (Child & Adult Food Program). Quality Rated also conducted visits at several of our centers.

Health

The 2023-2024 school year goal of **action pact** Head Start and Early Head Start Health Services program continue to be the monitoring of comprehensive health services such as immunizations, dental, medical, and mental health, and nutritional services, and early identification of health problems. Our Family Advocates continue to ensure every Head Start/Early Head Start child provides the necessary health services information to promote all aspects of health, behavioral health, and safety for children and families. The COVID Pandemic caused action pact to suspend toothbrushing for the last two school years. However, because of reduced rates of COVID cases toothbrushing was reinstated for the 2023-2024 school year. Sites were again able to facilitate and monitor necessary oral health preventive care, referral for treatment and follow-up, including topical fluoride treatments. Although COVID cases have decreased, action pact will continue to utilize the COVID Mitigation Policy approved the last school year by the Policy Council.

Securing dental homes continues to be a challenge for our parents. On average less than 40 percent of our parents can access dental care for their children. Being very rural, most of our communities lack providers. Parents are experiencing long waiting times for appointments for their children in communities with providers. Our Family Advocates continue to work with parents to address and assist them with this challenge.

There was a total of 98 children with diagnosis that required an Individualized Health/Allergy Plans for review by the Health Specialist for the 2023-2024 school year. **Action pact** had two Head Start related births during the past school year. One from Brantley County and the other from Ware. Because of the significant increase in the number incidents at our sites this year, the Incident Report Form was revised, and the Health Specialist travelled to each site to meet with staff and completed training on the revised form, address concerns and re-emphasize expectations of active supervision and observation. Additional training will be provided prior to the upcoming school year with a focus on child safety and incident reductions. **Action pact** continues to keep the health and safety of our children and staff a top priority of our program.

HEALTH SERVICES (Early Head Start)				
Health insurance - children	(1) # of children at enrollment	(1) % of children at enrollment	(2) # of children at end of enrollment	(2) % of children at end of enrollment
C.1 Number of all children with health insurance	270	99%	271	99.4%
a. Number enrolled in Medicaid and/or CHIP	267	97.90%	268	98.02%
b. Number enrolled in state-only funded insurance (for example, medically indigent insurance), private insurance, or other health insurance	3	1.11%	3	1.11%
C.2 Number of children with no health insurance	3	1.11%	2	1.0%

Accessible health care - children				
	(1) # of children at enrollment	(1) % of children at enrollment	(2) # of children at end of enrollment	(2) % of children at end of enrollment
C.5 Number of children with an ongoing source of continuous, accessible health care provided by a health care professional that maintains the child's ongoing health record and is not primarily a source of emergency or urgent care	263	96.40%	273	100%
a. Of these, the number of children that have accessible health care through a federally qualified Health Center, Indian Health Service, Tribal and/or Urban Indian Health Program facility	0	0%	0	0%
Accessible dental care – children				
	(1) # of children at enrollment	(1) % of children at enrollment	(2) # of children at end of enrollment	(2) % of children at end of enrollment
C.16 Number of children with continuous, accessible dental care provided by an oral health care professional which includes access to preventive care and dental treatment	59	21.70%	65	23.80%
Infant and toddler preventive dental services (EHS and Migrant programs)				
			# of children at end of enrollment	% of children at end of enrollment
C.19 Number of all children who are up to date according to the dental periodicity schedule in the relevant state's EPSDT schedule			65	23.80%

HEALTH SERVICES (Head Start)				
Health insurance - children				
	(1) # of children at enrollment	(1) % of children at enrollment	(2) # of children at end of enrollment	(2) % of children at end of enrollment

C.1 Number of all children with health insurance	537	98.40%	542	99.10%
a. Number enrolled in Medicaid and/or CHIP	525	96.10%	532	97.30%
b. Number enrolled in state-only funded insurance (for example, medically indigent insurance), private insurance, or other health insurance	12	.22%	10	.2%
C.2 Number of children with no health insurance	10	.2%	5	.1%

Accessible health care - children				
	(1) # of children at enrollment	(1) % of children at enrollment	(2) # of children at end of enrollment	(2) % of children at end of enrollment
C.5 Number of children with an ongoing source of continuous, accessible health care provided by a health care professional that maintains the child's ongoing health record and is not primarily a source of emergency or urgent care	361	66.02%	385	70.40%
Accessible dental care – children				
	(1) # of children at enrollment	(1) % of children at enrollment	(2) # of children at end of enrollment	(2) % of children at end of enrollment

C.16 Number of children with continuous, accessible dental care provided by an oral health care professional which includes access to preventive care and dental treatment	203	37.20%	249	45.06%
Preschool dental services (HS and Migrant programs)				
	# of children at end of enrollment	% of children at end of enrollment		
C.17 Number of children who received preventive care during the program year	207	38.00%		
C.18 Number of all children, including those enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP, who have completed a professional dental examination during the program year	452	82.07%		
a. Of these, the number of children diagnosed as needing dental treatment during the program year - at end of enrollment	11	2.05%		
1. Of these, the number of children who have received or are receiving dental treatment - at end of enrollment	6	60%		

Facilities

With the changeover of some classrooms from Head Start to Early Head Start, these rooms had to have changing tables and additional vent and plumbing work, which was completed in all these rooms. These rooms were also subject to state licensing amendments, which were all completed and approved prior to their opening.

Our Charlton County facility had a new roof completed by the county as the old one was leaking in several areas. Our Ware County Head Start Center also had to have a new roof installed as well due to several leaks.

“Health and Safety Grant” funds through DECAL (Department of Early Care and Learning), afforded us the opportunity to order a number of items for the playgrounds such as benches, picnic tables, outdoor music and art materials, gross motor and various other items. Many centers were able to have new walkie talkies purchased with these grant monies, creating a better communication system when on the playground. Three centers also had their emergency lighting updated.

Cameras were updated at our Clinch Center and new sewer pipes were installed in the Ware County Head Start Center due to some bathroom toilets overflowing.

Our Coffee County Center had a fire in one of the Early Head Start rooms, which was the result of an electrical issue. A new a/c unit has been installed and the entire center was professionally deep cleaned. Construction has started on the new addition at our Coffee County Center. It will house an additional four classrooms and a commercial kitchen.

Farm to Early Childhood

We continue to embrace the “Farm to ECE” movement and have increased gardening and taste testing activities at the centers. The Family Farm Share, in collaboration with Georgia Organics, has continued and we were able to add Bacon County during the program year. Plans are to continue to grow this program and to add Brantley County next year. This program offers a low-cost, high-quality access point to fresh local food. Grant funds are used to reduce food insecurity for children ages birth to 5 and their families. This pilot program has been so successful that Georgia Organics has already duplicated it with another Head Start program in the state.



Ware County Head Start Center’s satsuma orchard has started growing. The children enjoy helping water the trees and continue to check their progress. Many of our centers have expanded the use of

their raised bed gardens and we were also to train parents on how to make healthy and inexpensive snacks. We added a number of taste testing activities in the classrooms and the children enjoyed assisting with the recipes and trying new foods. We are excited that our Applying Head Start Center will be part of a pilot Quality Rated Nutrition and Physical Education Endorsement in the upcoming year. We continue to look at ways of expanding our Farm to Early Childhood Education program.



Family Services

For the 2023-2024 school year, the Family advocates conducted in person applications and also completed some over the telephone to accommodate families that were not able to come to the centers. The 2023-2024 funded enrollment numbers changed slightly for Early Head Start and Head Start due to the conversion. The funded enrollment numbers for Early Head Start increased from 248 to 320; Head Start funded enrollment numbers went from 652 to 515. There were a few centers who were not able to open all their classrooms, or had a delay in opening, due to staff shortages. These included classrooms in Bacon, Candler, Charlton, Clinch, Toombs and Ware.

Parenting Curriculum

The Performance Standards requires programs to have a parenting curriculum for parents. We chose Ready Rosie again this year. Ready Rosie is a research-based curriculum that builds on parents' knowledge. It uses video and mobile technology to allow schools and families to work together to promote school readiness. Ready Rosie has over 1,000 "modeled moments" videos in English and Spanish. These videos are delivered to families by text, email, or app and are available to families 24/7. Ready Rosie provides programs with the means to reach all families and to customize and individualize as needed. One on one training for Ready Rosie was given to all teaching staff and Center Coordinators.

What to Do When You're Having a Baby

Each year we have an annual "What to Do When You're Having a Baby" workshop/baby shower. However, due to the lack of interest from the parents this past year, we were unable to have our

workshop. We provided the guidebook plus diapers and wipes to the three expectant moms, who were interested in the workshop. The plan for next year is to try to offer the workshop twice a year.

Parent and Family Engagement

At **action pact**, we recognize that parents are their child's first and most important teachers. Parents play an integral part in the program and serve on the programs committees, Policy Council, Health Services Advisory Committee, and the ERSEA Committee. They also assist the program with center activities, program curriculum planning, self-assessment, and volunteer in the classrooms and at the centers. Parent training was geared toward the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework and the seven Family Outcomes areas. Topics included: Becoming a Leader — elections were held for parent officers and Policy Council members, Car Seat Safety, Adult Learning Opportunities, Parenting Tips, Managing Stress, Literacy, Service Center Resources, Challenging Behavior, Budgeting, Child Abuse Prevention, Fire Safety, Child Safety, Enrollment/Re-enrollment, Transitioning and Kindergarten Readiness, Health Department Resources, and Healthy Lifestyles. Parents often receive text messages and emails containing parent resource information. Additional specialized training opportunities, such as “Ask the Baker” workshop was provided by members of the Truist Bank. A budgeting class was given by the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Specialist, using the Economic Mobility Toolkit on the ECLKC website.

Parent of the Year

Sierra Eason, a Toombs County Early Head Start Parent was named **action pact** Parent of the Year. Ms. Eason was the action pact’s Policy Council Chair, served on the Health Services Advisory Committee, and assisted with the agency’s annual self-assessment. Ms. Eason was also regularly active at the center and instrumental in having large turnouts for the parent meetings and special activities. Thank you, Ms. Eason.



Health Services Advisory Committee

The Head Start program has an active Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) that meets three times a year: February, May, and September. Members have included: an audiologist, representatives from our local Health Department, Southeast Health District, Babies Can't Wait, Children's Medical Services, Children First, Family Connections, community representatives, and representatives from other community agencies or related businesses. Parents and family members are also encouraged to attend the meetings. There is a brief training at the meetings on a health topic, then program staff discuss successes and challenges that they are working on concerning health, nutrition, disabilities, and mental health components. Advice from the HSAC is often requested from staff to assist on various health-related matters. Community updates and parent comments/questions are also part of each meeting. Our Health Specialist is a retired Chief Epidemiologist with Public Health which adds valuable insight to our committee. Family Advocates are also invited to the meetings so that they can pass on valuable information to families.

Policy Council

Head Start grantees must ensure they have an established Policy Council and a well-functioning governing body which shares the responsibility for the oversight of the program while following the Performance Standards. Program governance in Head Start is a shared responsibility. Board members and Policy Council members are critical to the success of our program. The Policy Council also shares responsibility with the management team to ensure there are effective systems, policies and procedures that strengthen the program's quality. Their role is to help the management team deliver high quality services to the children and families we serve. The Policy Council is responsible for reviewing and approving the Head Start budget, personnel hiring/terminations, grant applications, procedure changes, monthly financial statements and credit card expenditures, and other important items. Parent Policy Council members serve as a link between parents and the Parent Committee. Policy Council members report back to their center's Parent Committee, and in doing so they help they parents they represent better understand the role and functioning of the Policy Council. This also allows the members to keep the parents updated on what is going on within the program. Currently, **action pact's** Head Start Policy Council consists of twenty-eight member slots: twenty parent representative slots and eight community representative slots. There is a Head Start parent representative and alternate slot for each of our twelve-county service area. There are additionally two at-large Early Head Start slots available. Policy Council members may serve for up to a maximum of five years.

Education

This is a critical time in our enrollees' lives to develop patterns that will help our children succeed in school and in life. It is important that **action pact** Head Start Early Head Start creates an environment that children can learn through exploration, play, and active involvement with their environment.

All areas of development (approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language

and literacy, cognition, perceptual, motor, and physical development) are important and interrelated. We have activities that include all areas of development and allow for individual differences in children with special needs and dual language learners. We keep our parents informed of their child's development and encourage their active participation in our program. We provide ongoing support and education to families to assist them in their role as their child's first teacher.

Curriculum

Action pact Head Start and Early Head Start uses Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers and Twos, as well as the 6th edition of Creative Curriculum for Preschool. In using Creative Curriculum, teachers are provided with the content and tools needed to encourage and support every type of learner. The studies provided in the curriculum tap into children's natural curiosity, resulting in a learning environment that is both fun and intentional. The topics of study are flexible allowing teachers to incorporate many of the typical themes that are used in preschools. The children guide the direction of the studies and the length of the study. By using the newest editions, it benefits children by increasing more knowledge, new resources, and up to date opportunities for learning.

Some of the studies that are included in the Preschool sixth edition include the following: Balls, Clothes, Buildings, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Trees, Water, Wheels, and Exercise. These studies usually run from four to six weeks.

Our teachers find the resources available to them to be very helpful. Some of the resources available to our teachers include the following: teaching guides, intentional teaching experiences, mighty minutes, and book discussion cards. These resources help the teachers plan and manage every minute of the day. These resources also help to prepare engaging learning experiences throughout the day.

To ensure staff are utilizing the curriculum, the Education Specialist completes a fidelity curriculum checklist. These checklists are completed in each classroom yearly. The Daily Resources that are identified are instructional tools that feature expanded and detailed guidance for providing intentional, responsive care and teaching during routines and learning experiences for very young children. Because of routines and experiences that build each day, and the responsive care and teaching provided during these times, children are enabled to develop a secure attachment with important people in their lives and gain confidence in themselves as learners.

Both curriculums, The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos and the Creative Curriculum for Preschool supply our staff with a solid foundation. These foundations consist of volumes that provide theory, research, and best practices for responsive teachers. The resources are both research-based and research proven.

The supportive curriculum solutions are used by staff, helping them to provide children with developmentally appropriate programs that support active learning and promote progress in all developmental areas. This curriculum has helped us to create a high-learning environment that enables every child to become a creative and confident thinker.

Monitoring

As noted in the Head Start Performance Standards, our Head Start and Early Head Start Programs utilize on-going monitoring to measure program performance, identify areas of concern, make immediate program corrections, and generate reports. Head Start Specialists and Center Coordinators use the Monitoring Checklist to observe classrooms. The Education Specialist monitors the fidelity of the curriculum, and the CLASS Coordinator completes CLASS observations. We also use the ITERS and ECERS tools to monitor. These tools are used when preparing for Quality Rating. Center Coordinators routinely monitor the classrooms at their site.

Classroom files are also monitored, and the classrooms are checked through the fidelity curriculum as well as for appropriate teacher-child interactions. These checks help ensure that the classroom has a relaxed and cheerful environment, intentional teaching is taking place, materials are prepared in advance, and that activities are designed to meet specific objectives for individual children.

The safety of each classroom is monitored monthly. Any safety concerns are addressed immediately and are designed to meet specific objectives for individual children. The safety of each classroom is a top priority.

Screenings

All enrollees are required to be screened within 45 days of enrollment. Ages and Stages is the screening tool used for our Early Head Start enrollees younger than 3 years of age, is completed by the parent. The DIAL-4 (Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning) is conducted by trained staff and used for Head Start and Pre-K enrollees ages 3 to 5. Early Head Start children who turn 3 years old during the year are additionally screened with the DIAL-4 tool once transitioned into a Head Start classroom. Our program met the 45-day deadline as required. These screenings help us identify children who need further diagnostic assessment.

Enrollees that do not pass the DIAL-4 and Ages and Stages screening are re-screened using the DAYC-2. Prior to the re-screening parental consent is required. After the DAYC-2 is completed by the Disabilities Specialist and results are shared with the parents.

Assessments

Assessments reflect children's growth and learning. This information is used to intentionally plan instruction. Teaching Strategies Gold is the assessment tool used by both Early Head Start and Head Start to record and access observations online and allows teaching staff to enter observation data to track each individual child's progress throughout the year. Child assessment reports are shared with parents three times per year following each assessment period. Center Coordinators discussed findings with each teaching team the results of each quarterly assessment, as well as the site and program results. In addition, data is shared with each partnering school system.

For the 2023-2024 spring assessment report the following domains had the highest percentage. In the Below category, Language was the highest at 26%, for meeting, it was Cognitive at 69%, and for exceeding it was Social – Emotional at 21%. With this being the final assessment period for the 2023 – 24 school year, the majority of our enrollees have met or exceeded all areas.

Relationships with LEA's

We continue ongoing communication with local schools to exchange information about children as we both share an interest in children's school readiness. At the end of each assessment period, information is shared with partnering school systems so that we mutually work to prepare children for the next phase of their education. LEA's (Local Education Agency) also have input in the adoption of our school readiness goals. We also have a Transition/Disabilities Agreement with our LEA's. These agreements are completed annually. All agreements for the 2024 – 25 school year have been reviewed and approved.

School Readiness

Action pact Head Start collects, analyzes, and aggregates school readiness data during the year to track individual child progress, as well as the program's overall achievement of its school readiness goals. Goals are reviewed and updated as needed to strengthen identified areas of weakness. Each site has a School Readiness Committee that is selected each year made up of parents, staff, and school system staff which offer input and suggestions in the selection of school readiness goals. Each child receives individualized instruction based on his/her strengths and needs. The curriculum is evidence-based and specifically designed to help children develop in the areas of language and literacy, problem-solving skills, and learning how to socialize and interact with others. Children are provided with the opportunity to participate in activities that support math, science, art, drama, language, and culture. Our goal is for our children to leave **action pact** Head Start prepared for kindergarten, excited about learning, and confident in their own abilities and ready to succeed.

Enrollees in **action pact** Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms showed continuous growth during the 2023-24 school year. Based on documentation for each of the eight designated goals, the data suggests that enrollees will be better prepared for the next step in their educational process having been a part of our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. As we continue to offer the children of our communities a positive start to their education, we expect the effects to be long lasting. Enrollees in our Head Start program had a greater percentage of enrollees meeting/ exceeding program expectations in our School Readiness Goals.

We use the Teaching Strategies Gold to evaluate each child's developmental level and progress. With the use of the research based Creative Curriculum, which is aligned with the Georgia Learning Standards and the Head Start Learning Outcomes Framework. We feel that we are on our way to children being ready for school, families ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children. This sums up Head Start's approach to school readiness.

Transition

Transition plans were completed on enrollees entering Head Start and kindergarten. Enrollees' files

were transferred to the schools where they would transition. Parental consent was obtained prior to the transfer.

Parents were encouraged to continue to prepare their child for the transition throughout the summer months. This can be done by reading books about kindergarten/preschool, visiting the school they will be attending, attending the school's Open House, setting up playdates with some of their future classmates, encouraging their child to discuss their feelings, having the child write a story with their parents about what his or her first day at kindergarten/preschool will be like. We want to ensure the parents display a happy, excited mood about the transition so that the child will look forward to the big day.

We have well planned transition services for enrollees transitioning to Head Start and for those children transitioning to kindergarten. These services begin at 2 years 6 months for the Early Head Start enrollees as well as offering services to those children transitioning to Pre-K and kindergarten. These services are in place to make the transition into and out of our program easier for our children and families. Our staff and families partner together to share information and plan supportive transition practices. Together they create transition plans that help with each child's adjustment to their new learning environment and make it a positive experience.

Transitioning into Head Start: Introduction to the program (how to get answers, daily schedule); Inform parents of open-door policy; How family members can be engaged in their child's learning (volunteering, doing home activities); provide a program calendar (identifies events and parent opportunities); and provide "Get Ready for Preschool," a starter kit for You and Your Child which includes: Helping Your Preschooler Learn (at home activities); Learn about You, Your Child and Preschool; Time for Preschool (activities for parents to do with their children); and a handout on families as advocates and leaders.

All Head Start enrollees transitioning from Head Start to kindergarten talk about the transition, watch videos, and read books about going to kindergarten. Through the videos, children and families get to see how a typical day unfolds. In one such video "Ready, Set, Go! All Set for School," children and parents get to view a kindergarten room.

From the video entitled, "From the Children's Perspective", it explains how the transition to kindergarten looks through the eyes of a child. For those children transitioning out of Head Start and Early Head Start, our staff provides support through transition in the following ways:

1. Promote successful changes in their daily schedule and routines
2. Provide positive transition experiences
3. Provide staff that help children feel safe and trust adults
4. Include parents in the transition process
5. Listen to the family's perspective, be supportive of their concerns, worries and questions
6. Provide information on kindergarten (Open House, Registration, etc.)
7. Provide resources on transitioning
8. Create a clear transition plan with families
9. Promote independence
10. Promote cooperation
11. Provide transition packets

Transition packets are distributed prior to the closing of school. The transition packets include resources for parents with transitioning children which includes the following: Stickers; Calendar with activities to use to countdown to the big day; A starting school activities book; Learn About You, Your Child and school; Helping Your Preschooler Learn and Your Child's Education – You Can Make a Difference.

We also have a Transition/Disabilities Agreement with our LEAs. All agreements have been completed and returned for the 24-25 school year.

CLASS

The agency's CLASS Coordinator maintains current reliability in the Infant, Toddler and PreK CLASS tools. She also maintains CLASS Trainer credentials in both the Toddler and the PreK CLASS tools. She recently attended training for the second edition of CLASS.

During the 2023-24 school year, Head Start classrooms were monitored using the CLASS Pre-K and the Infant and Toddler tool. CLASS results were separated into three colors indicating the level of support needed. Red indicates the greatest level of support needed, while yellow indicates improvements are being made. Green indicates the staff are successfully carrying out the dimension indicators.

Based upon review and discussion of CLASS, our program's areas of strength were identified as:

- CLASS training for all new classroom staff
- Extensive "Coach" training
- Individualized coaching
- Coaching successes evidenced in CLASS scores
- Use of Crosswalk of NCQTL In-Service Suites with the CLASS
- In-house CLASS trainer
- Coaches are CLASS reliable.
- Recognition of staff that scored all greens in CLASS.

While we continue to celebrate coaching successes, we also continue to strive to grow the continuous process of improvement. Our system, in place for training new staff as they come on board, gives staff an overview of CLASS and how it should be evident in the classroom. Our professional development includes periodic training and observation opportunities for new staff as they become more familiar with CLASS. For example, new staff receive a training session on CLASS during Orientation to introduce the tool and the Agency's expectations. In addition, CLASS data was analyzed, and a coaching plan developed for classrooms to begin in the fall. With these systems in place, we expect continued improvement in our CLASS scores and more importantly, improved teacher-child interactions throughout our program.

Coaches

In accordance with Performance Standards relating to Coaching, **action pact** currently has four

individuals employed as coaches. Each Coach has a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in Early Childhood or a related field, which is the requirement for this position. Most of the Coaches have been trained in Practice Based Coaching and all have received their CLASS reliability in the Pre-K tool. All sites have a coach assigned to them which we feel has contributed to the improvement of **action pact's** CLASS scores.

Teachers are provided one-on-one coaching and mentoring so that new training lessons are incorporated into daily routines and teachings. Through a consistent, systemic, and guided approach, coaches present feedback in a supportive and non-judgmental manner that encourages each teacher. Working together, the coach and the teacher develop an individualized plan which results in enhanced classroom interactions and classroom environments. The coach and the teaching staff being coached create shared goals and prepare an action plan for achieving them. Focused observations are based on the action plan. The coach provides support for the teacher's growth and development through reflection and feedback. Through this collaborative partnership our teachers are provided support, gains rapport and trust, make choices and maintains ongoing communication. Coaches and the CLASS Coordinator provided training throughout the year. Some of the topics were as follows: Creative Curriculum, CLASS, TSG, ECERS, and ITERS. These training courses are also offered as part of new staff orientation.

Mental Health

For teachers and parents, it's important to provide social and emotional support to students during these most challenging times because it directly impacts their learning. **Action pact** Head Start and Early Head Start maintains a culture of caring. Above all, children are empowered and provided with a sense of belonging. When children feel confident, they also develop a measure of resiliency that helps them navigate an unprecedented and disruptive time like this. The agency has a Mental Health Specialist and a Licensed Professional Counselor on staff. Both Mental Health staff members work to support the staff, children, and families in the Head Start program.

All of our Head Start and Early Head Start sites are contacted frequently throughout the month by her and she is on-call for them in case of an emergency or need arises to visit that center to provide services. Open, fluid communication is ongoing between our staff and counselor throughout the school year.

In addition to the Mental Health Specialist and LPC on staff, Head Start and Early Head Start have implemented the use of Behavior Interventionists to assist the children who need one on one help with inappropriate or aggressive behaviors. The Behavior Interventionists are located strategically throughout our service areas. The placement of the Behavior Interventionists depends on which child needs one on one help at the moment, also prioritizing the most aggressive behavior.

Mental Health is promoted in all components to ensure the children's overall health and well-being. Our counselor completes the referral process upon the parents' consent with an assessment of the referred child. She collaborates with the teaching staff to provide individualized strategies and techniques to help struggling children adapt to the classroom environment. Along with the strategies

and techniques in the classrooms, the counselor can provide parents with similar strategies and techniques to ensure consistency in the classroom and home environments.

Regarding the Mental Health aspect of the program, the Second Step Curriculum and Conscious Discipline techniques are used to assist with non-violent behavior. The Second Step Curriculum uses role playing and puppets to help the children learn how to socialize with others and manage their own emotions. The Conscious Discipline Program teaches our children how to breathe and describe their feelings to regulate their own emotions, and this includes always encouraging a designated safe place area in the classroom.

The DESSERTS mental health event involves working with all our staff. DESSERTS stands for STRESSED when spelled backwards. During our training on ways to relieve stress we offer some sweets and treats for our staff with a calm, inviting atmosphere to enjoy ourselves and learn ways to decompress at the end of the day. Along with the DESSERTS training, the Mental Health Specialist sends out the monthly Mental Health TID-BIT to families with resources and information on Mental Health issues affecting people today.

Disabilities

Local Education Agencies (LEA) and private providers are back into the school environment. Meetings concerning IEPs/IFSPs continue to happen both virtually and in person, according to parent/guardian preference. Families were given access to the Disabilities Specialist via in person, phone calls, email and virtually if needed. The Special News Flash and Mental Health Tidbit newsletters were sent out to families via email and sent home with students from in-person teaching classrooms.

Children with special needs encompassed over 10% of the funded and current enrollment for the 2023 2024 program year. In the area of special needs, the Head Start and Early Head Start programs provided services for 129 Head Start children and Early Head Start children throughout the school year. Some of the services provided to the children with special needs included the least restrictive environment and inclusive classrooms. Every classroom, along with the inclusion classrooms, were provided materials that were sensitive to the needs of the disabilities of each individual child. Equipment and learning devices were in place to promote learning and inclusion in the classrooms.

We have a strong relationship with the Board of Education staff (IDEA, Part B), the Babies Can't Wait program staff (IDEA, Part C) and the local private providers such as Speech Language Pathologists. The local Board of Education staff in each of our counties also worked with the Head Start staffing in our inclusion classrooms, providing one-on-one interactions with the children and collaboration with the Head Start teachers.

At our Head Start and Early Head Start programs, services available included Speech/Language; Pre-school Intervention; Vision Impairment; Physical Therapy; Hearing Impairment; Mental Health Services; the Special News Flash newsletter and Mental Health Tidbits with the Babies Can't Wait staff working

with our children under three years old with special needs. Newsletters for the families served under the local board of education of each county and the Babies Can't Wait program were sent out to staff for parents in order to provide information on various disabilities and local and national resources.

Training was accomplished on a one-on-one basis, with the parent's receiving information in the Special News Flash newsletter. The Disabilities Specialist met with parent's one-on-one to answer any questions or concerns they had with the services involved in an IEP or IFSP document or the process in doing so. Many of the parents were given resources for support groups and programs to which many joined to find needed services or resources. Training by Parent to Parent of Georgia took place this year as well.

Children diagnosed with special needs for the 2023-2024 school year are noted below. All these children either had a current Individualized Education Plan or Individualized Family Service Plan in place and accounted for 17.32% of the program's Current Enrollment and 15.21% of the program's funded enrollment as of May 2024. The total count of children with IEPs and IFSPs at one time this school year in our programs was 129 students.

Children Diagnosed with Special Needs: May 2024
Head Start: 86; Early Head Start: 25; Total= 111
Current Enrollment= 17.32%; Funded Enrollment= 15.21%.

Category	Head Start	Early Head Start
Vision Impairment	1	0
Hearing/Deafness	0	0
Deaf/Blind	0	0
Emotional Disturbance	0	0
Autism	1	0
Health Impairment	1	0
Traumatic Brain injury	0	0
Learning Disability	1	1
Orthopedic Impairment	0	1
Speech/Language	28	7
Developmental Delay	5	12
Intellectual Disabilities	0	0
Non-Categorized-Other	0	0
Multiple Disabilities	49	4
Total	86	25

Second Assessment Tool: Developmental Assessment of Young Children Ed. 2. DAYC-2

The Developmental Assessment of Young Children-Second Edition (DAYC-2) is an individually administered, norm-referenced measure of early childhood development in the following domains: cognition, communication, social-emotional development, physical development, and adaptive

behavior for children from birth through age 5 years 11 months. The assessment can be used for one area of concern or a full assessment in all areas. The DIAL-4 and Ages & Stages assessments mark any concerns while the DAYC-2 is the second assessment. Either can make a referral necessary or not necessary for a child.

A second assessment, DAYC-2, was implemented this year to help with the process of referral of children who may not need referrals or need services. The DAYC-2 was used with Early Head Start and Head Start programs. The use of this new assessment tool allowed for more data on the child's abilities after being in the program for a month or two following DIAL-4 and Ages & Stages assessments. While the second assessment tool is not required, the DAYC-2 allows for a truer look into the child's knowledge base and helps control the disproportionate number of African American children referred for Special Education. In some cases, the results from a second assessment have helped the parents to see that there may be a learning issue.

Exceptional Children's Week

Each year Georgia celebrates Exceptional Children's Week which is a time to celebrate the accomplishments of exceptional children. **Action pact** Head Start takes immense pride in celebrating this milestone along with the rest of the state and the Council for Exceptional Children. Centers plan special activities to highlight the work the program does with children who have special needs as well as recognizing teachers for the extraordinary work they do.

Alicia Rameriz from Atkinson County Head Start was recognized for her extra efforts in educating all children, including exceptional children. She provided structure and worked one on one with a child to make his learning and school time a wonderful and productive experience. Ms. Rameriz works hard to celebrate the strengths and differences of each child, and helps to make the classroom a happy, well organized, and productive place. She also helped the other teachers in the room by maintaining the routine for all the children in the classroom. Ms. Rameriz received a gift basket full of goodies, both for personal use and for use with future children with disabilities.

We also had a poster contest that was part of the Exceptional Children's Week. One of our Pre-K/Head Start teams, Daphne Booth and Jennifer Hardy won with a beautiful puzzle poster the children helped to color. A small gift of goodies was given to them as well.



Inclusive Early Learning Week

Our teaching staff, families and children celebrated Inclusive Early Learning Week in collaboration with the Department of Early Care and Learning in the state. To promote inclusion in our centers, the Disabilities Specialist revamped the themed days and activities so that all children and staff could participate. A parent flyer went out to the families to participate in special activities with their children. Here at Head Start and Early Head Start, Inclusion is heart work!

Federal Review

From January 23, 2023, to January 25, 2023, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted a Focus Area One (FA1) monitoring review of **action pact** Head Start and Early Head Start programs. There were no areas of concern, no areas of noncompliance, and no deficiencies.

Emergent & Family Literacy

Emergent and Family Literacy continues to be a priority at Head Start. Programs and special events such as the National Play Doh Day, Read Across America, JumpStart Read for the Record, Georgia Read Aloud Day, and others were held. Family Reading Nights were held at many of the centers and Family Holiday Craft Night was added to additional centers.

The program has been awarded a \$3,000 grant for the upcoming year, “BookSmart: Get Georgia Reading.” The goal will be to register 200 – 500 families to use “BookSmart.” BookSmart allows families to download books to read to their children right on their phones, tablets, etc., once a week. We will have funds for sign up events, materials, and supplies for these events to make it fun and gift cards for families who reach milestones. We are excited about this family literacy grant and plan to introduce it to families with a Family Literacy event at the centers.



Several of our centers continue to have local groups continue to fund their participation in the Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy. Parents are encouraged to complete their high school education, and family advocate staff refer families to their local adult education centers.

Professional Development

Action pact Head Start continues to be very proactive in the area of staff development and training. The program has a DECAL (Department of Early Care and Learning) approved trainer, one CLASS certified trainer (Pre-School and Toddler); two American Heart Association CPR and First Aid trainers; one PALS (Physical Activity Learning Sessions), one certified safe sleep instructor, one certified Family Development Credential trainer; and one Darkness to Light instructor. Staff have also been able to take advantage of several online state-approved trainings. This year the Training Specialist was also able to become certified as a Fire Safety Trainer, along with the agency's Safety Officer. The program's Training Specialist has presented training at state and regional conferences as well as to other Head Start and child-care programs and is able to offer in person trainings to staff.

Staff members can take advantage of DECAL incentives and scholarship funds which are available to assist them in attending college and advancing their professional development. Changes to the incentive/ scholarship program have included the eligibility of all Head Start Centers. In addition, DECAL has also increased the number of payments to eligible staff and has increased the minimum amount earned, which has allowed additional staff to be eligible. The Training Specialist contacts staff members informing them that they may be eligible for this DECAL program and assists them with the application process.

All **action pact** Head Start teachers have an AA degree or higher and meet the Federal mandate or have a waiver in place as well as a professional development plan in place. Professional development plans are completed by staff and reviewed by the Head Start Director and Training Specialist, and training scheduled as needed.

We completed a Family Development Credential (FDC) class in November. Eight of our staff, and one from another program, earned their credential. The program's Training Specialist conducted the training and other staff were able to take on the Portfolio Advisor obligations.



We continue to look at ways to enhance and improve onboarding training for new staff. This year we added an Injury Prevention module to onboarding. Due to the staff shortages, we were not able to keep staff for as many days as we would have liked. We were able to include CLASS overview training for new staff.