2025-2026 PROGRAM YEAR

Blair County Head Start

ANNUAL REPORT



CABC
Our Commitment. Their Success.

cabc-bchs.org



Jennifer Neely, Executive Director, speaks at the Blair County Head Start Annual Stakeholder Meeting, held on June 3, 2026 at the Blair County Convention Center.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

The Federal Head Start program, which celebrated 60 years in 2025, remains relevant, fresh, and strong thanks to its commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement. Continuous Quality Improvement, or CQI, includes a cyclical process designed to ensure that programs foster inquiry, joint problem-solving, creativity, and innovation that is specific and relevant to the community the program serves. Thanks to a strong tradition of CQI, Blair County Head Start stakeholders can celebrate a wonderful 2025-2026 program year.

This year's report highlights notable achievements in responsible fiscal stewardship, strong performance in external monitoring reviews, full-enrollment, nurturing classroom environments, engaged families, excellent child outcomes and health statistics, and community collaborations that support the mission of Head Start and the comprehensive services it offers. These accomplishments reflect our commitment to providing comprehensive, high-quality services to children and families.

Additionally, I am happy to report Blair County Head Start continues to make progress towards our current Strategic Plan, which includes goals and objectives designed to guide the program throughout our grant period. At the midpoint, we can see significant progress across all three areas. Many of the initiatives that seemed ambitious when we began are now part of our day-to-day work, including strong systems, a thriving workforce, and plentiful opportunities for personal and professional growth.

On behalf of our organization and the Blair County Head Start program, thank you for your support.

Warm Regards,

Jennifer Neely

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Child Advocates of Blair County
CABC
Our Commitment. Their Success.

OFFICE OF HEAD START
An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

HEAD START AWARD & MONITORING

Blair County Head Start submitted a new five-year baseline application on October 1, 2023, and received a Notice of Award in January 2024, naming CABC as the grantee for the Blair County Head Start program. Funding for the current five-year grant period extends through December 31, 2028.

In May 2026, the Office of Head Start conducted a Focus Area (FA) 2 monitoring review. The Program Performance Summary Report received on May 14, 2026, indicated that Blair County Head Start was in full compliance with the requirements of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) or Public Law 110-134, Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007.

Additionally, the Office of Head Start conducted a CLASS® Video Review during the time period of February 2026 through May 2026. Observations were conducted in preschool center-based classrooms using the 2008 Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®). The CLASS® tool looks at three domains and ten dimensions of teacher-child interactions and measures those observed interactions on a seven-point scale. Blair County Head Start exceed quality thresholds in Emotional Support and Instructional Support. The program's Classroom Organization score met requirements and informed targeted quality improvement efforts. Training, coaching, and additional classroom support have already been implemented for the 2026–2027 program year to strengthen classroom organization practices.

HEAD START MANAGEMENT TEAM

JENNIFER NEELY
Executive Director

DARYL SARVER
Chief Financial Officer

KRYSTAL RHODES
Child Development & Education Manager

CAROL LEONARD
Family & Community Engagement Manager

AMANDA LYKENS
Health & Disabilities Manager

TROY BOONIE
Safety & Facilities Operations Manager

ANDREW KING
Transportatin Manager

ERICA PETERSON
Planning & Development Specialist

AIMEE SAPITA
Human Resources Specialist

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HEAD START ENROLLMENT

355
NUMBER OF CHILDREN SERVED

352
NUMBER OF FAMILIES SERVED

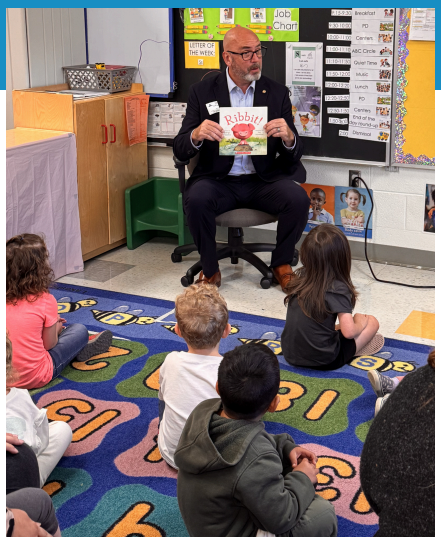
99.5%
AVERAGE MONTHLY ENROLLMENT



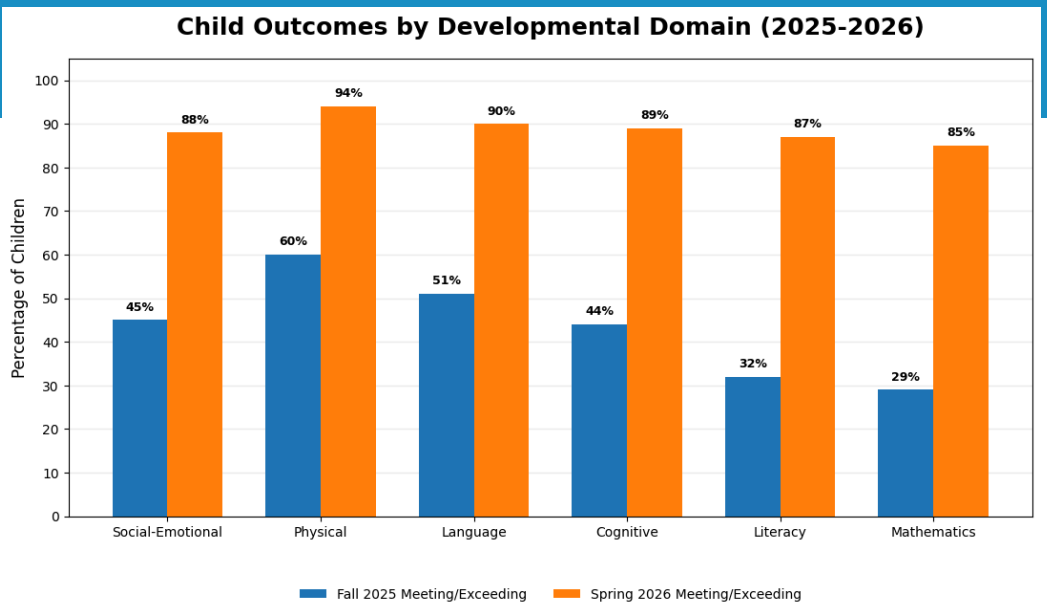
CHLIDREN CONTINUE TO SHOW GROWTH

The program uses the Battelle Developmental Inventory to assess children's development in the fall and spring, measuring progress across multiple developmental domains. Assessment results help guide individualized instruction and learning experiences to support each child's growth and school readiness.

Child assessment data demonstrated strong growth across all six developmental domains during the 2025–2026 program year. By spring, 85–94% of children were meeting or exceeding age-level expectations in every domain. Consistent with last year's results, the greatest gains were observed in Mathematics and Literacy, while Physical Development continued to have the highest percentage of children meeting expectations, reflecting strong skills at program entry. These results demonstrate the program's continued success in supporting children's school readiness and developmental growth.



PA State Representative Scott Barger visited the Head Start classroom located in Spring Cove Elementary School, Roaring Spring, PA in September 2025.



HEALTH SNAPSHOT

The following represents the number of children with up-to-date health requirements during the 2025-2026 year.

PHYSICAL EXAMS 99%

Children are required to have one physical (well) exam every 12 months.

IMMUNIZATIONS 96%

Children must have up to date immunizations. Ninety-six percent of children are up to date or have a waiver signed for refusal of vaccine.

DENTAL EXAMS 98%

Children are required to have one dental exam / screening every six months.

LEAD SCREENING 92%

HEMOGLOBIN SCREENING 94%

Head Start Program Performance Standards require that all enrolled children receive lead and hemoglobin screenings at the recommended ages to identify and address potential health concerns early.

HEALTHY HABITS, HEALTHY SMILES

During the 2025–2026 program year, Blair County Head Start partnered with Andrea Lascoli, Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioner and Dental Instructor at the Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center (GACTC), to promote healthy smiles and lifelong oral health habits for our children.

Through this partnership, Andrea completed dental screenings for all 270 children who were present across every Head Start location. In addition, GACTC Dental Program students engaged children in fun, age-appropriate lessons on proper toothbrushing techniques and the importance of making healthy, low sugar food and beverage choices.



Oral health is an important component of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, which emphasize ensuring children receive preventive oral health services and developing healthy habits that support overall well-being. The program looks forward to continuing this valued partnership during the 2026–2027 program year.

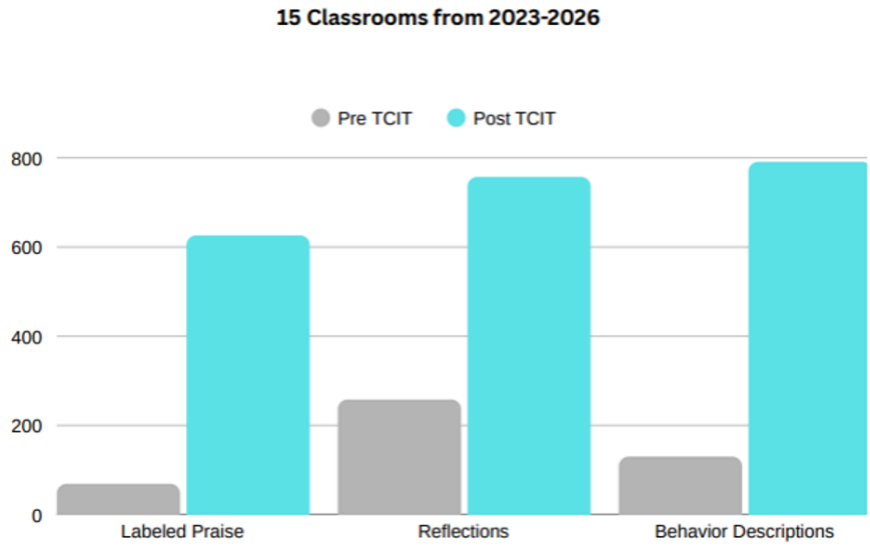
STRENGTHENING TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

Teacher-Child Interaction Therapy (TCIT) implementation has been established as a five-year program goal. During the 2025–2026 program year, TCIT was implemented in 15 of the program's 20 classrooms, marking significant progress toward full implementation.

Since beginning implementation in 2023, TCIT has strengthened the consistent use of evidence-based teaching practices, including intentional positive attention, behavior-specific praise, active ignoring of minor behaviors, calm and effective limit setting, increased wait time, and meaningful back-and-forth conversations that support children's language development. Teaching teams have also intentionally integrated Conscious Discipline strategies, such as co-regulation, emotional language modeling, problem-solving instruction, and predictable routines that foster safe, supportive learning environments.

Pre- and post-TCIT assessment data demonstrates significant growth in the use of positive teacher-child interaction strategies following implementation. Across 15 classrooms, teachers substantially increased their use of labeled praise, reflections, and behavior descriptions—core TCIT skills that strengthen teacher-child relationships and promote positive interactions.

TCIT ASSESSMENT DATA



TCIT data reflects professional growth in teacher interaction practices, including increased use of positive engagement strategies alongside reflective use of commands and questions.

These results reflect meaningful professional growth and increased fidelity in the implementation of relationship-based teaching practices.

As these practices have become embedded in daily classroom routines, measurable improvements have been observed in teaching practices, classroom climate, and child outcomes. Classrooms have demonstrated stronger emotional support, improved organization, and more responsive teacher-child interactions. Children have shown growth in self-regulation, social-emotional development, independence, language skills, and an increased sense of safety and belonging.

The integration of TCIT and Conscious Discipline has fostered a meaningful shift in the program's approach—from reactive behavior management to responsive, relationship-based teaching, and from adult-directed routines to child-centered learning. This ongoing work continues to strengthen the program's commitment to creating nurturing, predictable, and engaging learning environments where every child has the opportunity to thrive.



BUILDING STRONGER FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Strong family engagement is a cornerstone of the Head Start program and supports children's learning, development, and long-term success. Throughout the 2025–2026 program year, Blair County Head Start provided meaningful opportunities for families to connect with one another, engage in their children's education, and build relationships with staff and community partners.



The program's second annual End-of-Year Celebration and Resource Fair, held at DelGrosso's Park, welcomed 333 participants, including 90 enrolled Head Start children and 243 family members. Families also connected with representatives from various community agencies while learning about local resources and enjoying family-centered activities. Participating agencies included: UPMC for You, WIC, Penn State's Child Health Research Center, Altoona Public Library, Blair Family Solutions, Blair Senior Services, Goodwill CareerLink, and Family Services of Blair County.



To strengthen fatherhood and male involvement, Blair County Head Start introduced its first "Family Fun with the Guys" event in Spring 2026. Designed to encourage meaningful engagement between children and fathers, male caregivers, and positive role models, the event attracted 138 participants. Staff observed increased participation from fathers and male role models during end-of-year classroom events following the program's success.

These opportunities reflect Blair County Head Start's continued commitment to building strong family partnerships and connecting families with resources that support the well-being and success of every child.

SUPPORTING THE WHOLE FAMILY

Head Start's comprehensive approach extends far beyond the classroom by recognizing that children thrive when their families are supported. Through a whole-family approach, Blair County Head Start partners with families to strengthen stability, promote self-sufficiency, and remove barriers that can impact a child's ability to learn and succeed.

Throughout the 2025–2026 program year, Family Advocates connected families with a wide range of services, including health care, transportation, housing and food resources, crisis support, and community referrals. Through home visits, individualized goal setting, and ongoing case management, families received personalized support based on their unique strengths and needs.

- **1,144** HOME VISITS COMPLETED BY FAMILIY ADVOCATES
- **1,439** REFERRALS MADE TO FAMILIES
- **318** HOME VISITS FOR ATTENDANCE SUPPORT
- **213** ELIGIBILITY VISITS COMPLETED
- **780** GOALS SET WITH FAMILIES (644 COMPLETED)
- **150** FATHERS/MALE CAREGIVERS PARTICIPATED IN HOME VISITS & PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
- **200** FAMILIES ASSISTED THROUGH THE "LOVE IN A BACKPACK" FOOD PROGRAM
- **9** CAR SEATS LOANED VIA CAR SEAT LOAN PROGRAM

FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS

- **170** TWO PARENT HOMES
- **182** SINGLE PARENT HOMES
- **8** CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE
- **281** FAMILIES WITH AT LEAST ONE PARENT EMPLOYED, IN JOB TRAINING, OR IN SCHOOL
- **65** FAMILIES WITH AT LEAST ONE PARENT HOLDING AN ASSOCIATES DEGREE OR HIGHER
- **66** FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOUSING INSECURITY
  (AS DEFINED BY THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSSISTANCE ACT)

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PLAY IMPORTANT ROLE

On June 3, Blair County Head Start hosted its Annual Stakeholder Meeting at the Blair County Convention Center and was honored to welcome 30 participants from outside agencies, including representatives from the Pennsylvania Head Start Association, the Office of Governor Josh Shapiro, U.S. Senator John Fetterman's office, and Congressman John Joyce's office.

The meeting is part of Blair County Head Start's annual Self-Assessment process, a requirement of the federal Head Start Program Performance Standards. This process helps ensure we continue delivering high-quality services by identifying strengths, addressing challenges, and planning for continuous improvement.

Head Start staff, parents, Board and Policy Council members, community partners, school districts, human service agencies, other regional Head Start programs, and legislative representatives came together to discuss the needs of local children and families and explore opportunities for greater collaboration across our community.





The Altoona Fire Department, Fire Engine 312 visited the Faireview Hills Head Start classroom in October 2025 to teach children about fire safety.



Erica Peterson, Planning & Development Specialist, receives a book donation from the Sheetz Bright Horizons Little Sproutz Early Learning Center in August 2025 following a book drive organized for the Head Start program.

A LASTING PARTNERSHIP FOR HEALTHY CHILDREN

For more than a decade, Blair County Head Start partnered with Penn State's Child Health Research Center (formerly the Center for Childhood Obesity Research) to provide engaging nutrition education, physical activity experiences, and healthy eating initiatives for children and families. Since 2014, this collaboration—supported primarily through USDA SNAP-Ed funding—has enriched classrooms with evidence-based curricula, hands-on food tastings, gardening activities, healthy lifestyle resources, classroom materials, books, and equipment that promoted lifelong healthy habits.

Through programs such as Eat Well, Play Hard and CATCH Early Childhood, Penn State educators delivered interactive lessons that introduced children to healthy foods and encouraged active play. The Harvest for Healthy Kids curriculum provided repeated exposure to fruits and vegetables through sensory exploration, storytelling, and tastings, while Farm to Early Childhood Education activities allowed children to plant and care for their own seeds. Additional initiatives, including Sesame Street Healthy Habits for Life and participation in community events, extended learning through engaging, age-appropriate content and family-centered experiences. Families also received newsletters, recipes, and practical strategies to support healthy choices at home.

Beyond educational programming, Blair County Head Start families and classrooms contributed to numerous Penn State research studies exploring child nutrition, responsive feeding, food security, family health, and obesity prevention. These collaborative efforts helped advance research while ensuring that the voices and experiences of Head Start children, families, and educators informed future health initiatives and evidence-based practices.



While the loss of SNAP-Ed funding in 2025 has brought these outreach initiatives to a close, Blair County Head Start is grateful for more than a decade of collaboration that promoted healthy habits, strengthened families, and advanced child health research. The program remains hopeful that future funding opportunities will allow for continued partnerhsips with Penn State to support the health and well-being of children and families.

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

The Head Start Program Performance Standards require all programs to conduct a full Community Assessment at least once during the five year grant period. The program's most recent full assessment was conducted in the spring of 2020 with additional updates since that time. The assessment includes data regarding community strengths, needs and resources.

- The most recent U.S. Census Bureau data estimate Blair County's population at 119,541 residents (July 1, 2025). The latest available American Community Survey age distribution data indicate that approximately 2.0% of the population is comprised of children ages 3–4.

- The most current data from the Pennsylvania KIDS COUNT Data Center indicate that, in 2024, there were an estimated 7,730 children from birth to age 5 living in Blair County. Of those, 5,190 children (67.1%) were living in families with incomes below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. Additionally, 1,960 children (25.3%) were living in families with incomes at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

  **Head Start income eligibility is 100% or below the federal poverty guideline, while eligibility for PA Pre-K Counts falls at 300% or below.*

- As of June 2025, there were 8,370 SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) recipients in Blair County, including 842 children ages 3–4, representing approximately 10.1% of all SNAP recipients.

- The percentage of Head Start children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) remained consistent at approximately 15–16% over the past three-year period, indicating stable identification and service levels.

- The Pennsylvania Future Ready PA Index identifies Williamsburg Community Elementary School as having the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged elementary students in Blair County at 61.3%, followed closely by Altoona Area School District at 61.2%. Spring Cove Elementary School ranks third, with 51.3% of its students identified as economically disadvantaged.

- According to the 2026 Pre-K for PA Blair County Fact Sheet, an estimated 1,460 children ages 3 and 4 in Blair County are eligible for publicly funded, high-quality pre-kindergarten. Of those eligible children, 935 have access to high-quality pre-k, while 492 children (34%) remain without access.

- According to the 2024–25 Pennsylvania Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program, Blair County continued to have the highest number of identified children and youth experiencing homelessness in Region 6, with 721 students. Blair County accounted for approximately 28% of all children and youth identified as experiencing homelessness in the region, highlighting the continued need for coordinated educational and family support services.

- According to the 2024 American Community Survey, 152 Blair County children under age 6 live with a grandparent. Additionally, grandparents are responsible for 524 grandchildren under age 18, including 202 children living in households without a parent present, highlighting the important caregiving role grandparents play in the county.

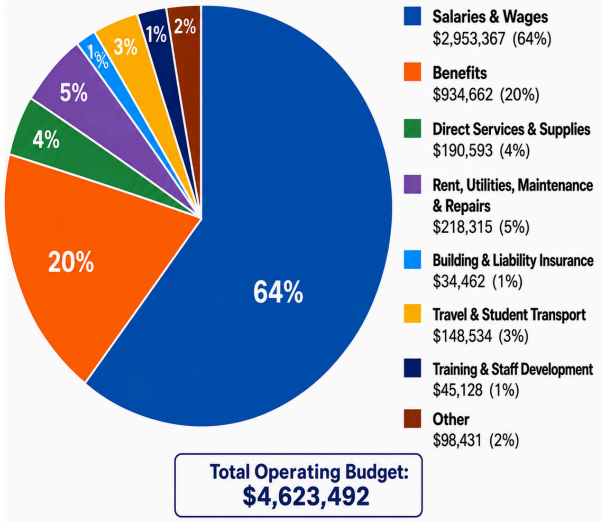
HEAD START FEDERAL & STATE BUDGETS

Child Advocates of Blair County, Inc. (CABC), the grantee for the Head Start program in Blair County, is funded to serve a total of 320 children county-wide with both federal and state grant funds.

In FY2026, CABC received $4,623,492 in federal funding from the Administration for Children & Families to serve 212 children. Additionally, CABC received $1,513,780 in Pennsylvania State Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) funds to serve 108 children in the 2025-26 budget year. In both the federal and state budgets, personnel wages and benefits occupy 83% of the entire budget for both grants.

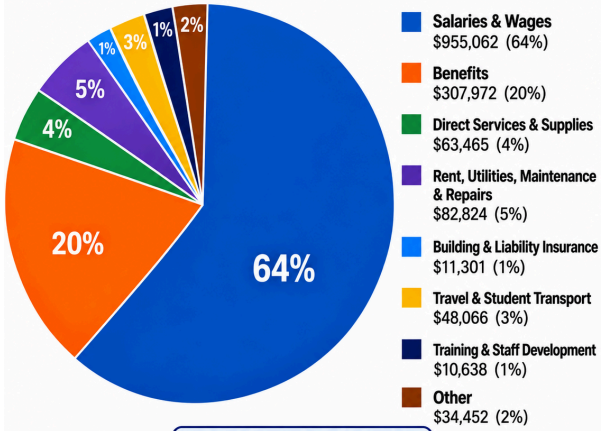
The most recent financial audit for January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025, was performed by Young, Oakes, Brown & Company, certified public accountants. In the independent auditor's report, the auditors expressed a "clean opinion" showing no findings of non-conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

Federal Head Start 2026 Budget



Total Operating Budget: $4,623,492

Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program Budget 2025-26



Total Operating Budget: $1,513,780