

Providing
HIGH QUALITY
early childhood
education and
family services
SINCE
1965

ANNUAL REPORT to the Community 2025-2026

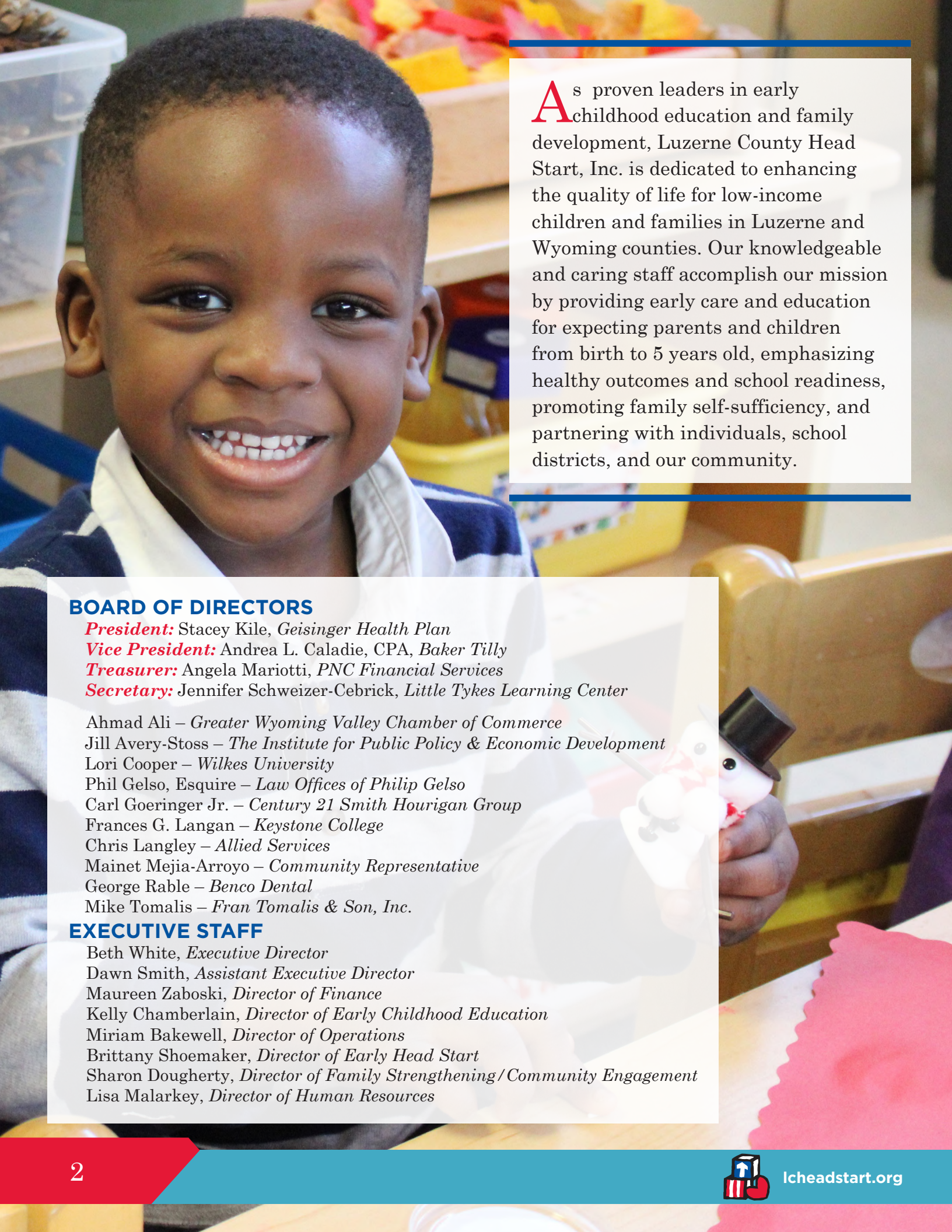


SERVING EXPECTING PARENTS, CHILDREN
FROM BIRTH TO AGE 5, AND THEIR FAMILIES
IN LUZERNE AND WYOMING COUNTIES

570-829-6231 | 800-551-5829

lcheadstart.org





As proven leaders in early childhood education and family development, Luzerne County Head Start, Inc. is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for low-income children and families in Luzerne and Wyoming counties. Our knowledgeable and caring staff accomplish our mission by providing early care and education for expecting parents and children from birth to 5 years old, emphasizing healthy outcomes and school readiness, promoting family self-sufficiency, and partnering with individuals, school districts, and our community.

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Mike Tomalis – *Fran Tomalis & Son, Inc.*

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Dawn Smith, *Assistant Executive Director*

Maureen Zaboski, *Director of Finance*

Kelly Chamberlain, *Director of Early Childhood Education*

Miriam Bakewell, *Director of Operations*

Brittany Shoemaker, *Director of Early Head Start*

Sharon Dougherty, *Director of Family Strengthening/Community Engagement*

Lisa Malarkey, *Director of Human Resources*

From Our LEADERSHIP TEAM:

This past year has been another meaningful chapter in our Head Start journey, continuing our commitment to creating opportunities, strengthening families, and helping children build a foundation for success.

Over the years, we have grown and changed with our community. We have expanded our services, strengthened partnerships, welcomed new opportunities, and continued to find ways to meet the changing needs of children and families. Through it all, our purpose has remained the same: **to give children the strongest possible start and to support families as they build brighter futures.**

At the heart of our work are the children and families we serve, the staff who bring compassion and dedication to their work each day, and the community partners who stand beside us. It is the countless moments, big and small, that come together to create meaningful change and make a lasting difference in the lives of children and families. We cannot do this work alone.

The past year has been one of both challenges and accomplishments for Head Start. We experienced moments that tested us, changes that required us to adapt, and circumstances that were not always easy. At the same time, we celebrated successes, embraced new opportunities, strengthened relationships, and found new ways to support the children and families we serve. Through the ups and downs, our staff continued to show resilience, creativity, and a willingness to come together and find solutions. We listened, we learned, and we made changes when needed, always keeping our mission at the center of our decisions. While every year brings its share of challenges, it also reminds us of what makes Head Start strong – the people who care deeply about children and families and are willing to work together to make a difference. As we move forward, we carry the lessons of this past year with us and remain committed to growing, improving, and creating opportunities for every child and family we serve.

For over 60 years, Head Start has been a promise of hope, opportunity, and possibility. Together, we have carried that promise forward – and together, we will continue creating brighter beginnings and stronger futures for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Stacey A. Kile

Stacey Kile
President, Board of Directors

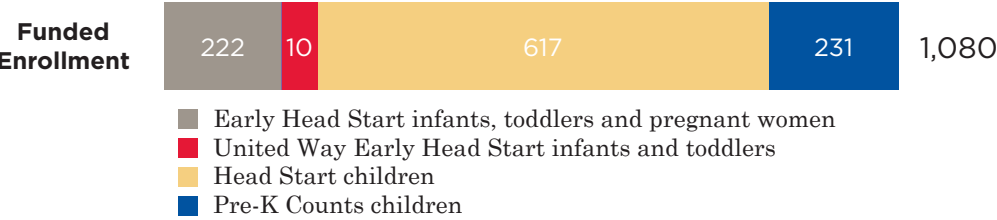


Beth White

Beth White
Executive Director



Children & Families WE SERVE:



Head Start/Pre-K Counts sites **17**
Early Head Start sites **5**



Head Start/Pre-K Counts classrooms **54**



Head Start children who received transportation **174**



Pregnant women **15**



Meals served **221,504**
EHS snacks served **355**

SCHOOL DISTRICTS SERVED

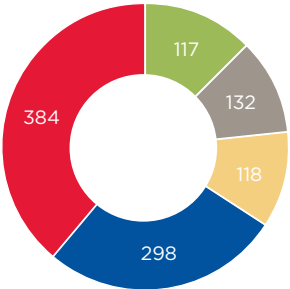
Crestwood
Dallas
Greater Nanticoke Area
Hanover Area
Hazleton Area
Lake-Lehman
Pittston Area
Tunkhannock Area
Wilkes-Barre Area
Wyoming Area
Wyoming Valley West

DEMOGRAPHICS

(numbers represent those served in the Early Head Start and Head Start programs)

Total Number of Families **980**

■ Under 1
■ 1-year-old
■ 2-years-old
■ 3-years-old
■ 4-years-old



AVERAGE MONTHLY ENROLLMENT

(as a percentage of funded enrollment)

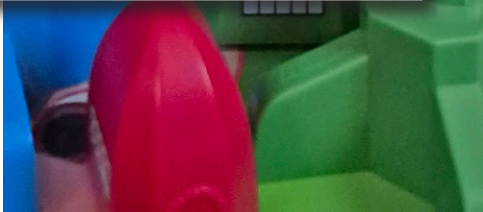
Head Start - **96%** Early Head Start - **96%**

Program - **96%**

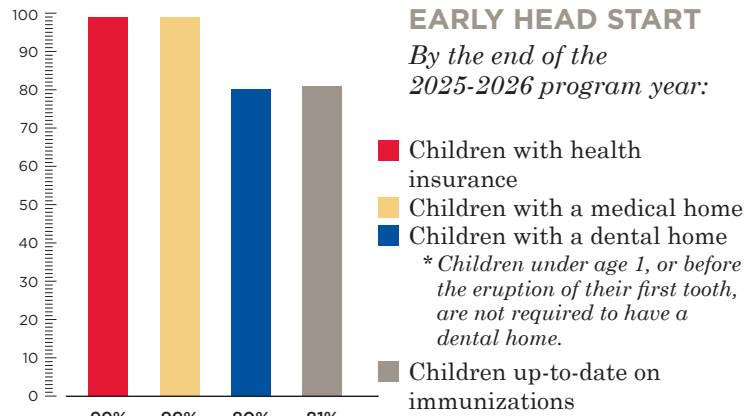
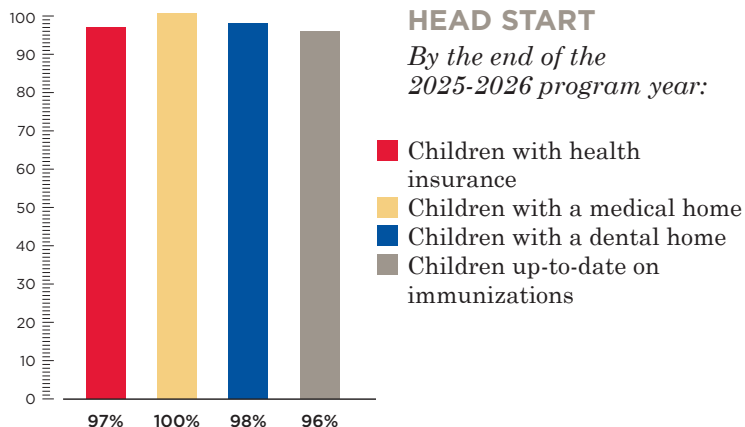


	24/25	25/26
Children experiencing homelessness	63	45
Foster children	15	20
Families receiving public assistance	879	885
Children with diagnosed disabilities	201	183
Single-parent families	546	520
Dual-language learners	474	500

*According to the most recent data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Center, 16.7% of children in Luzerne County and 13.2% of children in Wyoming County from birth to age 5 were living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level in 2024. Statewide, 16% of children from birth to age 5 were living at or below 100% of the FPL. Data also shows that in the 2025-2026 school year, 43.7% of children ages 3 to 4 living at or below 300% of the FPL in Luzerne County had access to publicly funded, high-quality pre-k in PA, while 46.9% of this population in Wyoming County had access. Statewide, 48.4% of children ages 3 to 4 living at or below 300% of the FPL had access to high quality pre-k programs. High-quality pre-k programs include PA Pre-K Counts, Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program and Child Care Works enrollments in Keystone STARS 3 and 4, Head Start, and school district pre-k.



Health & Dental OUTCOMES:



CHILDREN WHO RECEIVED LEAD SCREENINGS

99%

OF HEAD START ENROLLMENT

95%

OF EARLY HEAD START ENROLLMENT

**CHILDREN UNDER 9 MONTHS OLD ARE NOT REQUIRED TO BE SCREENED FOR LEAD.*



EDDIE EAGLE TEACHES GUN SAFETY

The Luzerne County Sheriff's Department visited our classrooms to present the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety Program. Deputies taught students what to do if they encounter a gun: stop, don't touch, run away and tell an adult. They also reminded students that law enforcement is there to keep them safe.

HEALTH & WELLNESS FAIRS OFFER SCREENINGS AND RESOURCES

Our summer Health & Wellness Fairs offered a wealth of resources for new and returning families. Held in Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton, the events allowed our staff to get a head start on children's required health screenings for the upcoming school year. Community partners also shared information on their offerings, covering everything from health and dental care to family services.



FOOD AND TOILETRIES PANTRY OPENS

We expanded our family support services by launching the Head Start Pantry with funding from the Luzerne Foundation. Available to LCHS families in Luzerne County, the pantry offers a variety of shelf-stable food, toiletries, paper products and cleaning supplies. Staff identify families who would benefit most from the pantry to ensure resources are directed to those with the greatest need.

HOW TO HELP:

Visit lcheadstart.org/donate or write a check to Luzerne County Head Start, Inc. and mail it to our administrative office: 23 Beekman St., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702. Be sure to designate the donation for the Head Start Pantry.



Screening, Assessment & Child OUTCOMES:

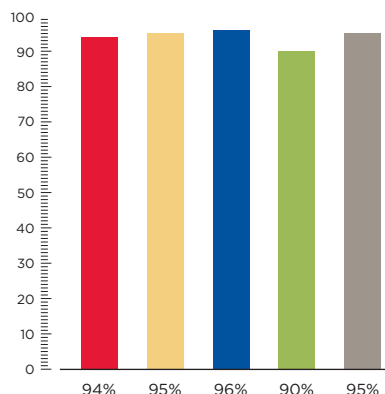
LCHS is committed to supporting children and families with school readiness, self-sufficiency, and success in life. Our program provides children with comprehensive health, nutrition, and other family support services, as well as a developmentally appropriate early childhood education.

LCHS uses Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) as the assessment tool for our Head Start program. This year, we used KinderCharts as the fall and winter assessment tool for our Early Head Start program before transitioning to Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP) Connect for the summer and spring terms. All tools support the goals and objectives of the curriculums we use in our early learning programs.

EARLY HEAD START CHILDREN 0 TO 3-YEARS-OLD

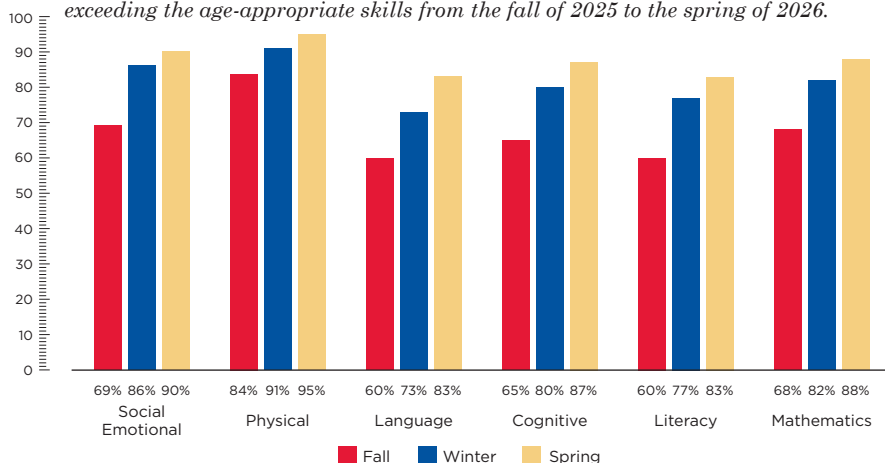
This graph represents the gains demonstrated by Early Head Start children who were assessed for at least two terms (six months) during the 2025-2026 program year.

- Language and Communication – 94%
- Approaches to Learning – 95%
- Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development – 96%
- Cognition – 90%
- Social and Emotional Development – 95%



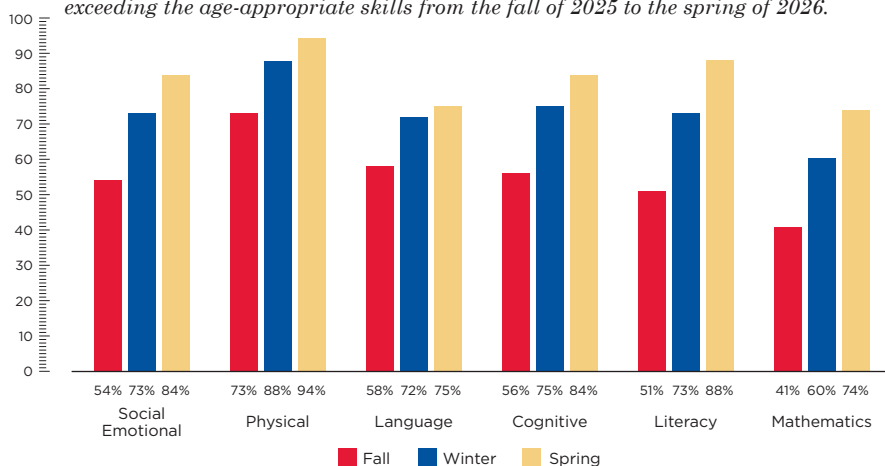
HEAD START/HSSAP CHILDREN 3-YEARS-OLD

This graph represents the percentage of Head Start children meeting or exceeding the age-appropriate skills from the fall of 2025 to the spring of 2026.



HEAD START/HSSAP CHILDREN 4-YEARS-OLD

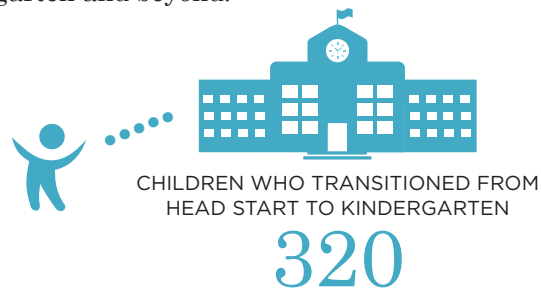
This graph represents the percentage of Head Start children meeting or exceeding the age-appropriate skills from the fall of 2025 to the spring of 2026.



Transition:

Preschool children make the transition into kindergarten more successfully when their schools and families prepare together, and when their preschool and kindergarten teachers connect. LCHS has a system in place to help children transition from one program to the next. This includes the transition from Early Head Start to Head Start and Head Start to kindergarten.

We have 13 Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with school districts in Luzerne and Wyoming counties. These signed agreements recognize the importance of facilitating a process between school districts and LCHS, which allows children to successfully transfer from our program to kindergarten and beyond.



Children who aged out of Early Head Start 54

Children who transitioned from Early Head Start to
Head Start 29

Children who transitioned from Early Head Start to another early
childhood program 17

Children who did not enter another early childhood program 8

A JUMP START ON LEARNING



United Way of Wyoming Valley funded a second year of Jump Start, our summer learning experience that gives first-time Head Start students early access to the program. Established in 1999, Jump Start acts as a supplemental session for children who were identified as having a high need for services and would benefit from extra time in the classroom. This year, 22 children participated in the program before school officially started. Parents also had opportunities to get involved through family engagement activities.

EARLY HEAD START RECOGNIZES STAFF

Home visiting is a powerful tool that provides education and support, makes stronger communities and builds resilience. Our Early Head Start team participated in National Home Visiting Week to recognize home visitors and the positive impact they make on maternal and child outcomes. Thank you to our family educators, who work tirelessly to build relationships, collaborate with community partners, remove barriers and advocate for the families we serve.



Family Engagement & OUTCOMES:

Family engagement is the cornerstone of Head Start. Through this interactive process, staff and families are empowered to build positive, goal-oriented relationships. Parents and caregivers work on goals they have set for themselves and their children with our support, which may center around educational advancement, economic mobility and other aspects of family well-being.

We employ 60 current or former LCHS parents. Thirteen of our 34 volunteers from this year were also past or present LCHS parents.

Parent Education & Employment *numbers represent those served in the Early Head Start and Head Start programs



Employed full-time **46%**
Employed part-time **15%**



In training or school **6%**



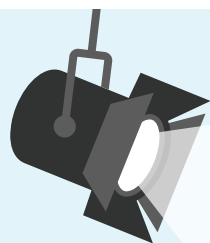
High school diploma or GED **49%**



Associate degree, vocational or some college **17%**
Bachelor's or master's degree **5%**



Family Engagement & OUTCOMES:



ENGAGING FATHERS AND FATHER FIGURES

Fathers are encouraged to be active participants in their children's learning and development at LCHS. We once again celebrated the Million Fathers March, a nationwide event in which fathers, father figures and male role models demonstrate their commitment to their children's education by escorting them to school. This year, 379 children had a father or father figure participate. We also hosted Parent Cafés specifically designed for fathers in the program.

Father Engagement

Child development experiences	391
Parenting education workshops	32
Family assessments	172
Family goal-setting process	162
Program governance	1



**numbers represent those served in the Early Head Start and Head Start programs*

LCHS POLICY COUNCIL

Parents have the opportunity to participate in program planning by joining the Policy Council, which acts as a link between our leadership and the families we serve. Members are elected each year and include parents of enrolled children and interested community members. Those involved participate in meetings and provide feedback on our services. This year, 17 parents served on the Policy Council.

Chairperson: Karoline McGrath

Treasurer: Ashley McGuire

Secretary: Amanda Johnson



CONNECTING THROUGH FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Parents are invited to attend family engagement events throughout the program year. These opportunities give families a space to learn and connect with others. Each center has a Parent Committee that meets in conjunction with an educational session or family activity. In partnership with Be Strong Families, we also host Parent Cafés for adults to engage in meaningful conversations and strengthen family bonds by building protective factors. Additionally, our staff present workshops on the Conscious Discipline social-emotional learning curriculum used at LCHS so families can apply these valuable tools at home.

Family Engagement Activities

Total activities held	170
Parents who participated	1,157
Policy Council meetings	12
Parent Committee meetings	138
Parent Cafés	8
Conscious Discipline workshops	12



Head Start **HIGHLIGHTS** 2025-2026:



United Way of Wyoming Valley

61ST ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON

Supporters of LCHS gathered to celebrate our commitment to enhancing the quality of life for low-income children and families. Along with awarding scholarships to Head Start alumni, we recognized staff for years of service and presented awards to community partners. We honored United Way of Wyoming Valley with the inaugural Heart of the Community Award and Fork Over Love with the Head Start Hero Award. Geisinger Health Plan was the event's Diamond sponsor.



Fork Over Love



SAVE THE DATE

for our 62nd Anniversary Luncheon
Monday, May 24, 2027
at Mohegan Pennsylvania.



HEAD START ALUMNI AWARDED COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

Now in its 40th year, the LCHS Alumni Scholarship Program – funded by businesses, organizations and individuals in the community – honors the achievements of former Head Start students set to graduate from high school and continue their education. We awarded \$20,775 in scholarships to 13 students, bringing the total to \$401,725 since the program's inception.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS HONORED WITH AWARDS

The Outstanding Community Partner Award acknowledges those who have made significant contributions to our agency. At this year's luncheon, we honored three partners: Core-Mark; Luzerne County Community College's Social & Behavioral Sciences Department; and St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Dallas.



Core-Mark



Luzerne County Community College



St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Head Start **HIGHLIGHTS** 2025-2026:



OFFICIALS MARK HEAD START AWARENESS MONTH

In recognition of Head Start Awareness Month, we welcomed 10 elected officials at the federal, state and local levels, as well as community leaders, to see the impact of our services. Guests included Congressman Rob Bresnahan and his wife, Chelsea. They read “The Leaf Thief” to students in Wilkes-Barre and spoke with our administrative team about the vital role early childhood education plays in preparing children for a bright future.



State Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski



Lindsay Griffin-Boylan, Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber of Commerce



LCHS RECEIVES IMPACT AWARD

We were honored to accept the Impact Award at United Way of Wyoming Valley’s campaign kickoff. The \$10,000 award, sponsored by Community Bank, recognized a United Way partner organization making a lasting difference in the lives of children and families. United Way funds our summer Jump Start program, as well as a caseload of Early Head Start children in Wilkes-Barre. We can’t thank United Way enough for its continued support.



Community & Staff **ENGAGEMENT:**



READ ACROSS AMERICA PROMOTES LITERACY

The National Education Association's Read Across America Week is the nation's largest celebration of literacy. Our students celebrated in style by reading their favorite Dr. Seuss books, wearing crazy hats, clothes and hairstyles, and even trying green eggs and ham. Classrooms also welcomed special guest readers from throughout the community.



BUILDING GOOD ATTENDANCE HABITS

Our Attendance Committee worked hard to improve school and home visiting attendance. Being present, on time and ready to learn every day is important for children's academic success from an early age. Too many absences can cause students to struggle academically and socially. The committee planned an agencywide initiative in which staff decorated their classroom and office doors to spread awareness of why a good attendance record matters.



STAFF ATTEND TRAINING AT KEYSTONE

We partnered with Keystone College to hold a professional development week for our direct service staff. Hosted on Keystone's campus, the training focused on strengthening children's well-being, resilience and learning through meaningful relationships and connections with nature. Hands-on activities gave staff the opportunity to explore how they can utilize the outdoors as an educational tool and develop nature-based learning projects. Facilitators included Dr. Fran Langan, a member of the LCHS Board of Directors, and staff from the Keystone College Environmental Education Institute.

Community & Staff **ENGAGEMENT:**

STAFF GRADUATE FROM LEADERSHIP NORTHEAST

We would like to congratulate our staff who completed Leadership Northeast programs during the 2025-2026 school year.

CORE PROGRAM



Rebekah Cleary
Fiscal Analyst

CORE PROGRAM



Lisa Malarkey
*Director of
Human Resources*

IMPACT: LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION



Cindy Garcia
*Teacher -
Plains Center*

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP



Maureen Zaboski
Director of Finance

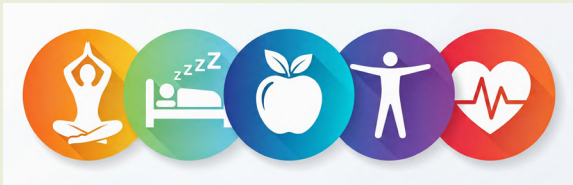
AMPLIFY: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP



Kelly Chamberlain
*Director of Early
Childhood Education*

WELLNESS DAY A CHANCE TO RESET

Our staff are the heart of everything we do. We continued to invest in the health and wellness of our workforce by hosting a special day off at Keystone College. Staff from all departments and service areas gathered for a day of activities focused on movement, mindfulness and creativity. When we prioritize employee wellness, our staff are able to recharge and continue bringing their best to the children and families we serve.



JUNIOR LEADERSHIP BRINGS NATURE EDUCATION TO CLASSROOMS

High school students in this year's Junior Leadership class partnered with North Branch Land Trust to plan a nature-based learning activity in our classrooms. Leah Malarkey, environmental education coordinator for NBLT, shared her expertise and brought various animal pelts and skulls for the children to see. Along with donating books, the Leadership team gave each child a seed kit to take home.

Head Start **SUCCESS STORIES:**

FINDING SUPPORT EVERY STEP OF THE WAY



When Brooke first came to Luzerne County Head Start as a young mother, she was touched by the supportive and understanding staff. It was clear how much they cared for each family.

“They make every child feel special in their program,” she said.

Brooke decided to enroll her daughters because they were struggling to learn basic skills. Both girls participated in the Early Head Start home visiting program before transitioning to a Head Start preschool classroom.

Her 5-year-old daughter Olivia had speech issues when she first started with LCHS. Olivia went from not speaking at all to talking in full sentences and effectively communicating with others, thanks in part to support and referrals from LCHS. Though she still struggles with enunciation, she continues making progress toward her speech goals.

Brooke’s older daughter Anastasia, who is now 10, showed behavioral issues during her time with LCHS. Staff helped Brooke address her daughter’s challenging behaviors and referred her to community resources. This led to Anastasia’s eventual diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD.

LCHS also supported the family through a challenging time when they had no choice but to leave their current living situation. Staff assisted Brooke with finding stable housing and helped the family with everything they needed along the way.

Brooke said it’s bittersweet that Olivia will begin kindergarten in the fall, as the staff at LCHS have come to feel like part of their family.

“I would recommend LCHS to other families with little children because I think kids need that structure and the help so they are better prepared for what’s to come when they start school,” she said.

Shown in photo: Brooke, Anastasia and Olivia

(Shared with family’s permission.)

A HEAD START AND A CAREER CALLING



Luzerne County Head Start provided Samantha with a supportive environment to step out of her comfort zone. Meanwhile, her mother Heidi was beginning a career making a difference in the lives of other families.

Samantha suffered from severe anxiety as a child, particularly separation anxiety. Samantha’s doctor suggested putting her in daycare or preschool, but the family couldn’t afford it. They qualified for Pre-K Counts, which gave Samantha the start she needed.

At first, Samantha struggled with anxiety in the classroom, even hiding when the school nurse visited for screenings. Over time, she adjusted while learning to manage her anxiety. Samantha developed a close bond with her teacher Miss Pat, who not only eased the transition, but encouraged her to socialize and develop independence.

“I believe Head Start impacted my life by giving me that strong foundation of learning and many techniques for both myself and my mom to use when I struggled most with my anxiety,” Samantha said.

During this period, Heidi was pursuing her college degree. She began volunteering at LCHS, which turned into a classroom substitute role. This led to working as an associate teacher once she graduated. Later, she pivoted to home visiting as an Early Head Start family educator.

Heidi worked with families who were nervous about sending their children to preschool. She shared her own experiences, which lessened their worries about the transition. Today, Heidi is a family worker, which blends her love of supporting families with being in the classroom.

“I am thankful for Head Start for many reasons,” Heidi said. “One is for supporting me and my family when my child was part of the program and giving me the opportunity to help families like mine.”

Years later, Samantha received a Head Start Alumni Scholarship to continue her education. Now 21, she is in the 1-2-1 Nursing Dual Degree Program with King’s College and Luzerne County Community College. She even had the opportunity to catch up with Miss Pat when her class came to LCHS for observations.

“I want to thank Head Start for being an important part in my education journey and I would like to thank my teachers for their kindness and support,” Samantha said.

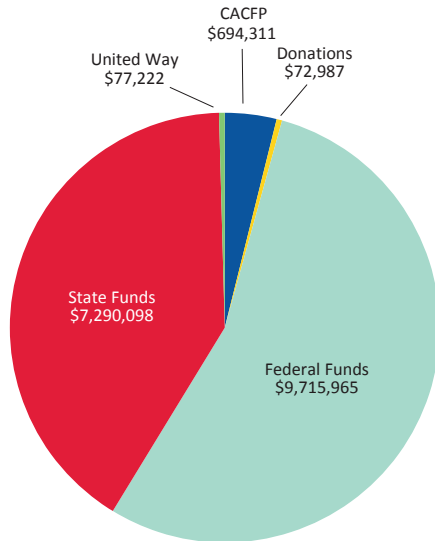
Shown in photo: Heidi and Samantha

(Shared with family’s permission.)

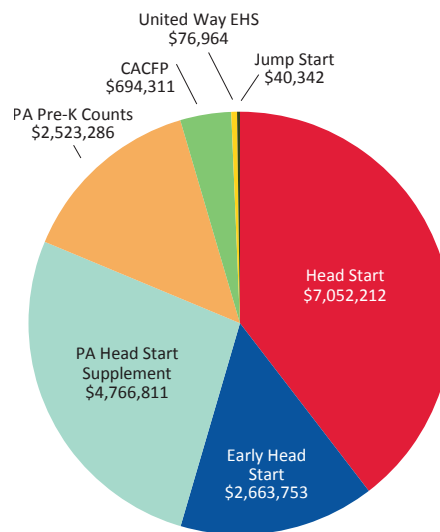
Budget & FINANCIALS:

Results of the 2025 financial audit of Luzerne County Head Start, Inc. reported no findings or material weaknesses.

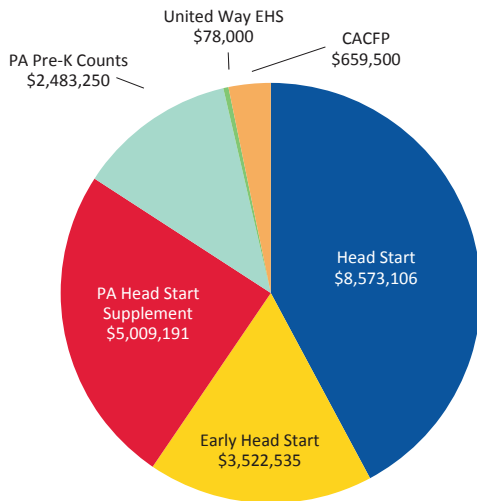
2025 FUNDING SOURCES



2025 EXPENSES BY PROGRAM

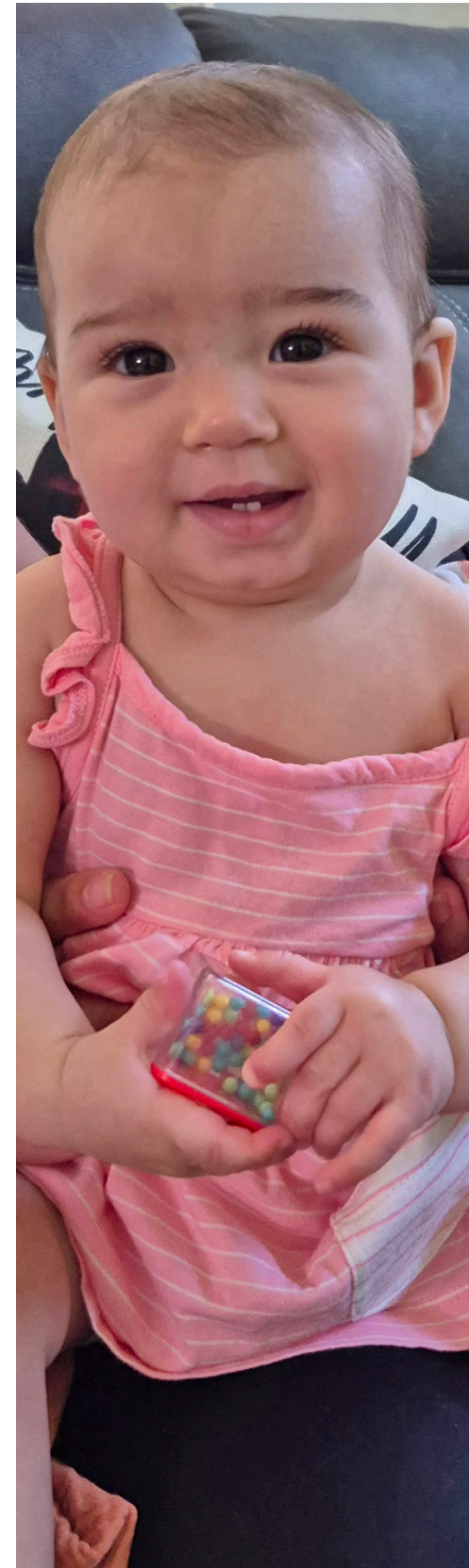


2026 PROJECTED BUDGET BY PROGRAM



ACCOUNTABILITY

Our most recent monitoring report in May 2025 determined LCHS was in full compliance with all federal regulations.



ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- 2025 administrative costs were \$1,172,745, or 12.07% of total expenses.
- LCHS has a cost sharing of 25% of our federal funds awarded. In 2025, the non-federal share was \$3,005,068.
- Transportation costs were \$520,625 for transporting 174 children in the 2025-2026 school year.





2025-2026

annual report **TO THE COMMUNITY**

lheadstart.org



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Luzerne County Head Start, Inc. is an equal opportunity employer.



United Way
of Wyoming Valley



This report is made available to the public through a mail/email campaign and our website/social media.



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Visit lheadstart.org to learn more about the comprehensive services we provide to children and their families.