



# YEARS *of* RESULTS

HEAD START | *Since 1965*



## West River Head Start

2024 + ANNUAL REPORT + 2025



### THE BEGINNING OF HEAD START

Head Start was created to help break the cycle of poverty by providing comprehensive educational, social, health, and nutritional support to preschool children from low-income families, essentially giving them a "head start" before entering kindergarten. President Lyndon B. Johnson launched the program as part of his "War on Poverty" in 1965. "I believe that this is one of the most constructive, and one of the most sensible, and also one of the most exciting programs that this nation has ever undertaken," he said in the Rose Garden ceremony.

Head Start has grown from an eight-week summer program to a variety of program options to meet the needs of the community. Head Start programs serve more than 1 million children and their families each year in urban, suburban, and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories, including American Indian and Alaska Native and Migrant and Seasonal communities. Head Start has served more than 38 million children.



### FUNDING

Head Start grants are administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. The grants are awarded directly to public or private non-profit organizations, including community-based and faith-based organizations, or for-profit agencies within a community that wish to compete for funds. The grant is awarded for a five-year period. HIT Inc. became West River Head Start's grantee in 1986.

A key tenet of the Head Start Act of 1965 established that the communities have an investment in its success through the contribution of volunteer hours and other donations as non-federal share. Federal grants fund 80% of approved costs with the remaining 20% met by non-federal sources. Community support in the form of time, equipment, supplies and space makes up the remaining amount needed to operate their Head Start programs.

The non-federal match must meet the same criteria for allowability as other costs incurred and paid with federal funds. Third party in-kind contributions count toward satisfying a cost-sharing or matching requirement only where, if the party receiving the contribution were to pay for them, they would be an allowable cost. Allowable costs are determined by the tests of reasonableness, necessity, and allocability. Head Start grantees are required to meet matching requirements on a budget year basis. West River Head Start met the required amount of \$517,519 with the majority coming from parent activities.

West River Head Start participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The program provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks for all children enrolled in WRHS.

The amounts for each funding sources for FY 2024-2025 include:

- ◆ Head Start grant .....\$2,070,076
- ◆ Non-federal share .....\$517,519
- ◆ USDA .....\$91,074

Expenses	Proposed	Actual
Personnel	1,708,035	1,701,090
Supplies & Other	655,276	663,297
HIT Admin	123,654	129,735
Occupancy	92,130	102,014
Food	89,000	89,073
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,668,095</b>	<b>2,685,209</b>

## ELIGIBILITY

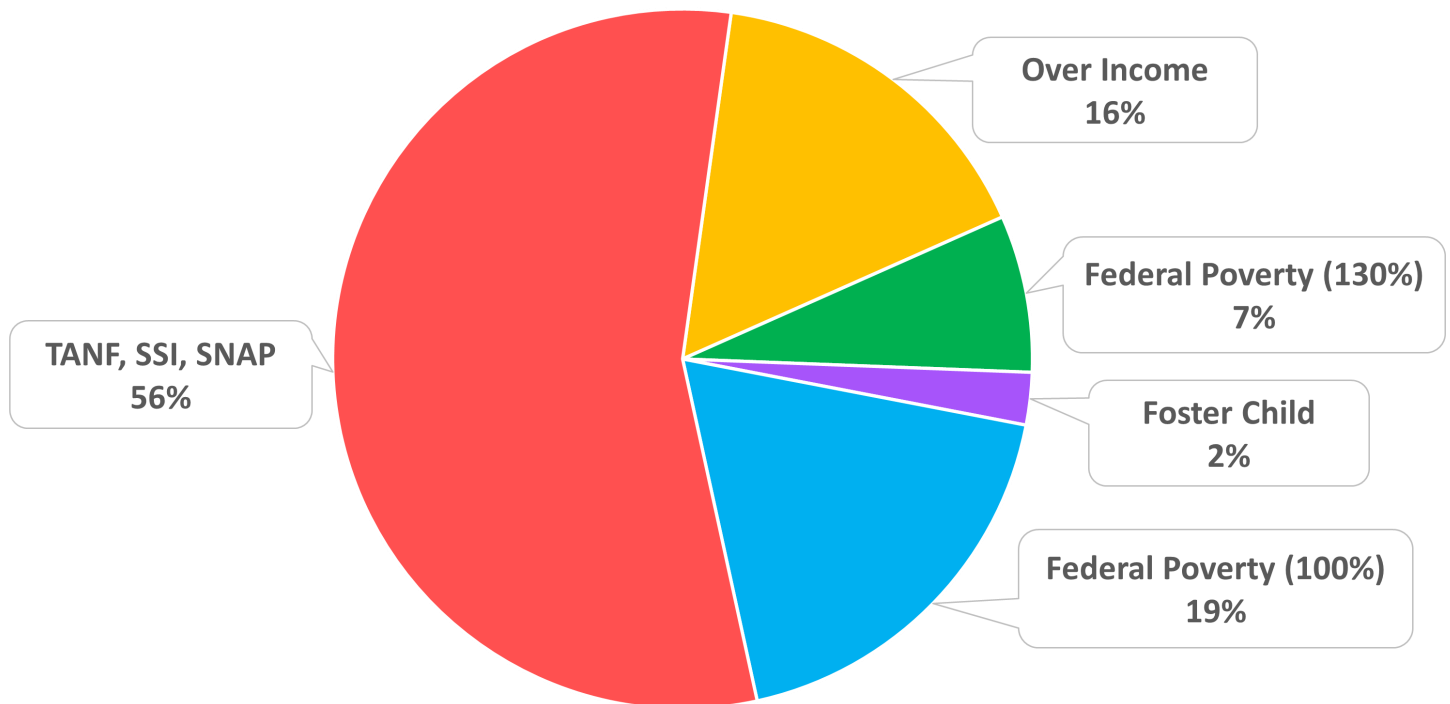
Head Start services are provided at no cost to all enrolled families. Eligible children are from families with incomes below the poverty guidelines, children from homeless families, and families receiving public assistance (SNAP, TANF, SSI). Foster children are eligible regardless of their foster family's income.

West River Head Start accepts applications year round. Options include submitting the application on our website or completing a paper version. Families submit income verification along with their child's birth certificate and immunization record.

- ◆ **Poverty Guidelines:** The HHS Poverty Guidelines are issued each year by the Department of Health and Human Services. Eligibility is determined using pay stubs, tax return or W2, child support, etc.
- ◆ **Public Assistance:** Families who receive TANF, SNAP, or SSI submit their eligibility letter.
- ◆ **Foster Care:** Foster children are eligible for Head Start services regardless of household income.
- ◆ **Homeless:** WRHS staff work with families to determine if they meet the eligibility criteria for services provided under The McKinney-Vento Act. The definition for children experiencing homelessness is defined as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence."

HHS Poverty Guidelines (for the 48 contiguous states)		
# of people	Year: 2024	Year: 2025
2	20,440	21,150
3	25,820	26,650
4	31,200	32,150
5	36,580	37,650
6	41,960	43,150
7	47,340	48,650
8	52,720	54,150

### ENROLLMENT BY ELIGIBILITY



## FEDERAL REVIEW

The Office of Head Start (OHS) uses the Head Start Monitoring System to measure the performance and accountability of Head Start programs and assess compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards, the Head Start Act, and other regulations. Three reviews take place over a five-year span, including the Focus Area One (FA1), Focus Area Two (FA2), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System Reviews (CLASS®)

- FA1 provides an opportunity for individual grant recipients to share the processes and systems that support their implementation of high-quality services for children and families served over the course of their grant cycle, including the:
  - ◆ quality of education services;
  - ◆ intentionality of family and community engagement;
  - ◆ monitoring of fiscal operations;
  - ◆ effectiveness of health and safety practices;
  - ◆ focus on eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance; and
  - ◆ oversight of program structures.

Grant recipients showcase their program strengths through (1) a planning call before the review; (2) an introductory meeting with the Management Team; (3) discussions with leadership, the governing body, and the policy council; (4) data tours with directors, managers, and staff members; and (5) touchpoints with the director on each day of the review.

- In FA2, OHS is looking for grant recipients to demonstrate their ability to track and assess their program's progress and performance, use data to drive results, and make adjustments and corrections as needed. The review team looks systematically and holistically across program services and functions.
- CLASS® is an observation tool that assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions in center-based preschool classrooms.



## FOCUS AREA 1 RESULTS

The Administration for Children and Families conducted the Focus Area 1 review of West River Head Start during the week of January 13, 2025. After an extensive review of the information gathered during the process through interviews and documentation, the FA1 review team determined our program meets the requirements of all applicable HSPPS, laws, regulations, and policy requirements. West River Head Start was found to have no areas of non-compliance, no areas of concern, and no deficiencies.

## UPCOMING REVIEWS

West River Head Start will undergo the Focus Area 2 and CLASS reviews in 2025-2026.

## FISCAL REVIEW

In addition to the federal monitoring reviews, our grantee HIT Inc. is audited annually by Eide Bailey. Eide Bailey completed the annual audit for HIT, Inc., for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. The report indicated no issues were found in regard to financial reporting, federal awards, or compliance with the Uniform Guidance.

## COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

West River Head Start continues to assess and alter its service delivery to meet the needs of each community, retain staff, and fiscally manage the program. This effort has resulted in various changes to include closing centers, decreasing classrooms, expanding classroom hours, and increasing staff salary. The first question posed after reviewing the results of the community assessment was to ask, "Is WRHS serving the right children?"

The programmatic changes over the years include:

- Closing sites (Elgin, Hebron, Beulah, Hazen) and one classroom in Mandan;
- decreasing the number of children served from 168 to 107;
- increasing salaries to retain staff; and
- increasing school day hours in Carson, New Salem, and three Mandan classrooms to meet child care and/or transportation needs in the communities

After reviewing the programmatic changes from the past years and recognizing the continued need for preschool services in the West River Head Start service area, sustaining sites in Mandan (increase to 5 classrooms), New Salem, and Carson while closing the Hazen site are recommended.

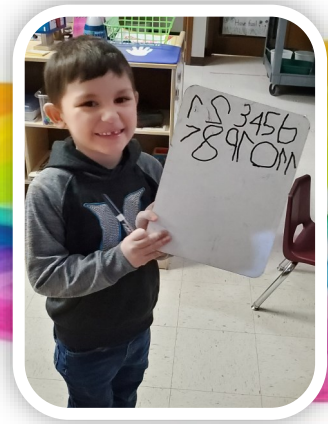
The community assessment describes the context in which Head Start programs operate and is useful for ensuring that the correct services are provided to the appropriate population. This resource assists program staff in coordinating their efforts to best serve children and families. The assessment paints a picture of the community and describes the diverse needs of families who may receive services. In addition, the community assessment covers the community's history, its economic and political scene, and its strengths and challenges. The community assessment in its entirety can be obtained by contacting West River Head Start. A summary of the report has been interwoven into the annual report.

# 60 YEARS *of* RESULTS

HEAD START | *Since 1965*



play learn grow



**OUR SERVICE AREA**

West River Head Start serves 107 eligible children between the ages of 3 to 5 in Morton, Grant, and Oliver Counties with five classrooms in Mandan, one in Carson, and one in New Salem. Children attend on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays during the school year. Staff use Wednesdays as a prep and training day. Two Mandan classrooms serve children for six hours each day. Five classrooms (three in Mandan along with Carson and New Salem) serve children for eight hours each day.

**GRAVEL AMENDMENT**

When a Head Start program operates in a community with a population of 1,000 or less people and meets the criteria of Section 645(a)(2) of the Head Start Act, the program may enroll up to 50% of over income children. The criteria for the Gravel Amendment include:

- a) there is no other preschool program in the community;
- b) the community is located in a medically underserved area and is located in a health professional shortage area;
- c) the community is in a location which, by reason of remoteness, does not permit reasonable access to the types of services described in clauses (A) and (B); and
- d) not less than 50 percent of the families to be served in the community are eligible under the eligibility criteria established by the Secretary under paragraph (1); the Head Start program in such locality shall establish the criteria for eligibility, except that no child residing in such community whose family is eligible under such eligibility criteria shall, by virtue of such project's eligibility criteria, be denied an opportunity to participate in such program.

West River Head Start may enroll no more than 24 over-income students. Mandan may serve up to 10% of children from over-income families (8 slots). New Salem and Carson meet the criteria of the Gravel Amendment and share 16 over-income slots. An additional requirement includes enrolling 10% with children who have an IEP.

◆ Funded Enrollment.....	107
◆ Average Monthly Enrollment .....	90.7%
◆ Special Education Enrollment .....	26
◆ Total number of families served .....	111
◆ Total number of children served.....	124
◆ Number of children who left the program in less than 45 days .....	7

## DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENINGS & IEPs

Identifying areas of concern early in a child’s education is crucial. Developmental screenings must be completed within 45 days of a child’s enrollment in the Head Start program. If potential areas of concern are identified, West River Head Start works with the local special education units and parents on the referral process.

Head Start programs must enroll 10% of their slots with children who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), indicating they were determined eligible to have a disability under IDEA and therefore eligible to receive special education and related services.

## HEALTH SERVICES & SCREENINGS

Head Start programs are required to meet Head Start Performance Standards related to health, nutrition, mental health, and safety in addition to the requirements of Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, & Treatment (EPSDT). Determining a child’s health needs starts with the well child and dental exams. Head Start programs have 90 days to ensure all enrolled children have the dental and well child exams completed. Concerns are followed up with further evaluation to determine if treatment is necessary. Heights and weights are measured once per year.

North Dakota Health Tracks (also known as EPSDT) sets the schedule and requirements that our program must follow regarding well child care, dental health, and immunizations.

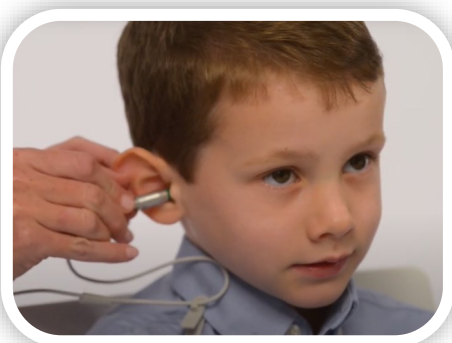
- Up-to-date on a schedule of age appropriate preventive and primary health care according to North Dakota’s EPSDT schedule for well child care ..... 90%
  - Completed a professional oral examination during the program year ..... 85%
  - Up-to-date immunizations or possible immunizations to date, or exempt ..... 0.02%
- \*Following CDC recommendations, children must receive both the influenza and COVID vaccines to be considered up-to-date on immunizations.

Vision and hearing screenings must be completed within 45 days of the child’s enrollment. Children are referred for further evaluation if there is a concern with vision or hearing.

- Vision: Out of 114 children, 15 were referred to an eye doctor. Six received glasses.
- Hearing: Out of 118 children, 10 were referred to their primary care provider for further assessment.

The family support coach works with each family to establish a medical and dental home and accessible health care. By the end of their enrollment:

- Children with health insurance ..... 99%
- Children with a medical home ..... 100%
- Children with a dental home ..... 100%



HEARING SCREENING



VISION SCREENING



HEIGHTS & WEIGHTS

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Through community partnerships, West River Head Start builds collaborative relationships with organizations and businesses that support positive child and family outcomes. These may include libraries, health centers, schools and school districts, economic support services, the workforce, higher education, human services agencies, faith-based organizations, businesses, and others. These organizations respond to families' needs and interests. They may connect families to outside resources, encourage engagement in children's learning, and use community strengths and needs assessment data to guide collaboration.

Partnerships promote successful transitions for children and families from one service setting to another or strengthen the individual child or whole family unit by providing multiple services alongside Head Start. Individuals, businesses, and local churches help with food drives, donations of cash and household items, Thanksgiving meals, Angel tree, winterwear, clothing, Christmas toy distribution, dental screenings, and educational opportunities.

## LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES

On October 29, 2024, the Mandan Kiwanis held a ribbon cutting ceremony to unveil the two Little Free Libraries that they built and installed at our Head Start site in Mandan. The Kiwanis have been involved with West River Head Start for many years through reading to our students and giving them books to inspire a love of reading. Our students get to choose a book four times per school year to keep to promote reading at home.



"Perhaps the most significant factor in the success of Head Start has been the involvement of parents, volunteers, and the community. Their commitment and the services provided by dedicated Head Start staff have been instrumental in creating a quality program that truly provides young children with a "head start" in life."

~ President Reagan, 1982



## Parent Feedback

*A great, nurturing environment for my child to learn and grow.*

*Head Start has been an amazing support system for me and my kids.*

*We absolutely love the teachers, and our foster kiddos have thrived and love going to school!*

*An opportunity to learn stuff that she wouldn't learn at home.*

*Head start is a wonderful program, teachers are amazing, and my child loves learning all the new things.*

*Helping my child thrive and grow so he is fully ready for kindergarten.*

*I have been able to get a job and not have to pay for childcare.*

*I'm so grateful for the teachers and all that they do to help my child.*

*Instrumental in our family being able to achieve our goals.*

*It's been great seeing my child flourish in the classroom and develop great socialization skills!*

*Love that staff is welcoming and takes time for each child.*

*My child is learning skills necessary to start kindergarten with confidence.*

*My child loves coming to school! The teachers and staff are kind and fun. You can tell they love their job! I appreciate Head Start very much!*

*Its truly been a life saver as I am raising my grandson and it helps with all areas.*

*Stability. Time management skills. Son has come out of his shell.*

## OUR MISSION

*West River Head Start is committed to giving children and their families the opportunity to grow within their communities by providing quality education and family services.*

## PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

From the beginning, Head Start programs were designed for both parents and children. Head Start focuses on nurturing positive relationships between staff and families, valuing the parents' unique knowledge of their child. Families engage in goal-oriented partnerships that promote family well-being, such as financial stability, housing, and health. Personalized support to meet families' needs include parent training, home visits, referrals, and connections to community resources. Family nights are held at each center to promote social interactions and provide education on various topics.

Head Start programs emphasize that parents are a child's first, most important, and most influential teachers. This approach fosters strong parent-child relationships, promotes family well-being, and provides tools for parents to support their child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development to ensure school readiness and long-term success. Parents are always welcome to join in activities. They are part of the educational goal setting process and receive regular updates on their child's progress.

Parental participation in program governance ensures that families have a voice in operations. Each classroom selects a representative and alternate to serve on Policy Council. The members work closely with the program's management team and the HIT Board of Directors to provide overall direction for West River Head Start.

## Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework

Positive & Goal Oriented Relationships			
Equity, Inclusiveness, Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness			
Program Foundations	Program Impact Areas	Family Outcomes	Child Outcomes
Program Leadership Professional Development Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement	Program Environment Family Partnerships Teaching and Learning Community Partnerships Access and Continuity	Family Well-Being Positive Parent-Child Relationships Families as Lifelong Educators Families as Learners Family Engagement in Transitions Family Connections to Peers and Community Families as Advocates and Leaders	Children are: Safe Healthy and well Learning and developing Engaged in positive relationships with family members, caregivers, and other children Ready for school Successful in school and life

# History of West

**1965:** Head Start was signed into law as part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty."

**1983-1986:** Community Action Partnership (CAP) established Mandan Area Head Start in 1983 as a home-based option serving 42 families in Mandan. CAP relinquished the Head Start grant to Mandan Public Schools in 1986.

**1986-1990:** The scope of service changed from home- to center-based services. Mandan Public Schools (MPS) established three classrooms to serve 42 Head Start children and families. MPS relinquished the grant to HIT, Inc. in 1990.

**1990:** HIT, Inc. expanded the program to four classrooms in Mandan.

**1991:** The grant expanded to include a home-base program for children in rural Morton County without additional funding.

**1992:** The community assessment indicated the need for center-based services instead of home-based. The New Salem classroom opened with 20 children in the basement of the city auditorium. Mandan added a classroom. Enrollment increased to 100 children.

**1993-1997:** Mandan Area Head Start remained at six classrooms. The New Salem classroom moved three times before residing in the New Salem Public Schools.

**1998:** The HIT, Inc. Board of Directors approved the name change to West River Head Start. WRHS opened sites in Elgin and Carson with 17 children each. Enrollment increased to 134.

**2000:** WRHS opened a classroom in Hebron. Four staff members were hired, increasing services to 152 children and families with 5 centers and 9 classrooms.

**2003:** WRHS expanded to Mercer county with classrooms in Beulah and Hazen. Five staff members were hired to serve an additional 16 children. Total enrollment increased to 168 children and families in 11 classrooms in 7 locations covering over 5,354 square miles.

**2006-2007:** The impact of our first funding cut resulted in loss of our year-round Head Start classroom.



**2007-2009:** Classrooms moved into the local public schools in Carson (2007) and New Salem (2009). The savings in rent, utilities, and maintenance allowed West River Head Start to keep both sites despite budget cuts.

**2010-2011:** The population of Grant County decreased to the point that it could no longer support two classrooms. The Elgin site closed and children were transported to the Carson site. WRHS's enrollment decreased from 168 to 160 with no decrease in funding.

**2012-2013:** WRHS suffered a 5% funding cut due to federal budget sequestration. The Beulah site was closed. Eligible children served in the Beulah area were combined with the Hazen classroom.

# River Head Start



**2013-2014:** WRHS continued to serve 160 children and families in Morton, Mercer, Oliver, and Grant counties. The Mandan site had five classrooms while Carson, Hebron, Hazen and New Salem each had one classroom.

**2014-2015:** WRHS received permission to use restored sequester funds to increase wages versus reopening Beulah's classroom. Even with a 9% increase, wages were still far below competitive rates. Finding and retaining staff continued to be difficult due to oil impact driving up the cost of living. WRHS lost 14 staff resulting in 40% turnover. An increase in transient population resulted in serving greater numbers of children and families for a short period of time.

**2015-2016:** The Hebron site closed due to the inability to fill the teacher position, along with one Mandan classroom. The reduction of slots did not affect income-eligible families or federal funding. Enrollment slots decreased from 152 to 118. WRHS decreased 5 staff positions. These actions allowed HIT to increase staff salaries to assist with focusing on quality over quantity.

**2016-2017:** The community assessment cited difficulty with daycare and transportation. WRHS received duration funds to increase school hours in Carson and New Salem from 6 to 8 hours. Three Mandan and the Hazen classes provided service for 6 hours a day and one room in Mandan provided preschool service for 7 hours.

**2018-2019:** WRHS received a duration grant to increase school hours from 6 to 8 hours per day in Hazen and one Mandan classroom. The New Salem classroom moved to a church basement due to spacing issues with the public school. WRHS received the Health & Safety Grant to purchase four new buses, a hearing machine, and a vision machine.

**2019-2020:** Classrooms closed on March 16, 2020, by order of Governor Burgum in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff distributed learning packets to each child's home for the remainder of the year and utilized virtual platforms to provide educational services to their students and stay connected with families. CARES Act Funding helped to coordinate, prepare, and respond to COVID-19.

**2020-2021:** Classrooms resumed in person with extra precautions being taken. Based on recommendations from the ND Department of Health, enrollment was decreased to 100.

**2021-2022:** West River Head Start resumed full enrollment of 118 students.

**2023-2024:** The Hazen site closed in March 2024 for the remainder of the school year due to the resignation of the teaching staff.

**2024-2025:** After years of struggling to keep staff, the Hazen site closed. A classroom reopened in Mandan. Enrollment decreased from 118 to 107 students with no cut in funding.

## CREATING THE SCHOOL FAMILY

A child's social emotional development and their ability to self-regulate is the first step to academic success. Conscious Discipline® is a relationship-based program that believes all behavior is a form of communication and an opportunity to teach missing skills. It works to develop discipline within children rather than relying on punishment. Children become more aware of their own worth, learn to respect the rights of others, and to follow classroom rules. The program emphasizes creating a school family that will:

- ◆ Increase the child's willingness to learn by creating a sense of belonging.
- ◆ Boost internal impulse control: a much more effective approach than an external system of punishment and rewards.
- ◆ Help children develop and apply sustained attention by reducing stress and encouraging classroom jobs in a caring atmosphere.

**The School Family is built on a healthy family model** – the goal of which is the optimal development of all members. The three essential ingredients for School Success include:

- ◆ **Willingness to Learn:** Without willingness, each interaction becomes a power struggle instead of a learning opportunity. The School Family brings all children and adults, especially the most difficult, to a place of willingness through a sense of belonging.
- ◆ **Impulse Control:** Connection with others wires the brain for impulse control. Disconnected children are disruptive and prone to aggressive, shutting down, or bullying behaviors. The School Family uses connection to encourage impulse control while teaching self-regulation skills in context.
- ◆ **Attention:** The School Family reduces stress while creating an atmosphere of caring, encouragement and meaningful contributions.

**The School Family is created through routines, rituals and structures.** Punishment and rewards are replaced with intrinsic motivation, helpfulness, problem-solving and connection. Intrinsic motivation is engaging in a behavior because you find it rewarding. The child chooses to perform an activity for its own sake rather than from the desire for some external reward. The behavior itself is its own reward.

A mental health consultant visits classrooms regularly to offer support and feedback on strategies and techniques helpful for individual or whole class instruction.



The School Family builds connections between families and schools, teachers and teachers, teachers and students, and students and students to ensure the optimal development of all.

## THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

School readiness means children are ready for school, families are ready to support their child's learning, and schools are ready for children. Head Start views school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.

Head Start is a leader in the early childhood field with a strong, clear, and comprehensive focus on all aspects of healthy development. The Head Start Program Performance Standards requires programs to establish school readiness goals, which are defined as "the expectations of children's status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve readiness for kindergarten goals." The Early Learning Outcome Framework (ELOF) domains include:

- **Approaches to Learning:** Approaches to Learning focuses on *how* children learn. It refers to the skills and behaviors that children use to engage in learning.
- **Social and Emotional Development:** Positive social and emotional development in the early years provides a critical foundation for lifelong development and learning.
- **Language and Literacy:** Communication is fundamental to the human experience, and language and literacy are essential to children's learning.
- **Cognition:** Cognitive development includes reasoning, memory, problem-solving, and thinking skills that help young children understand and organize their world. For preschoolers, this evolves into complex mathematical thinking and scientific reasoning.
- **Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development:** This domain is foundational to children's learning in all areas because it permits children to fully explore and function in their environment.



## PREPARING FOR KINDERGARTEN

West River Head Start implements the Creative Curriculum. The research-based teaching strategies, theory, and knowledge enable teaching staff to create a positive, developmentally appropriate, and responsive learning environment. DRDP, the assessment tool used for ChildPlus, generates outcome data to be reviewed with parents at conferences and home visits. Goals are developed with the parents based on their input and observations of their child and the child's individual development.

Our staff partner with elementary schools as families transition from Head Start to kindergarten. Children who experience a smooth transition to kindergarten are more likely to have improved academic achievement, positive social and emotional skills, and fewer behaviors that interfere with learning. The child's Kindergarten Transition Folder is completed in the spring and gives an opportunity for Head Start teachers to connect with receiving schools to share information that will assist in making the transition for children leaving Head Start and beginning their journey in kindergarten as successful as possible.

## CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT

Children enrolled in early childhood classrooms need engaging interactions and environments to support their learning. Quality teaching and learning occurs within the context of supportive relationships and intentional learning activities. Quality teacher-child interactions are essential for children’s social and academic development and learning.

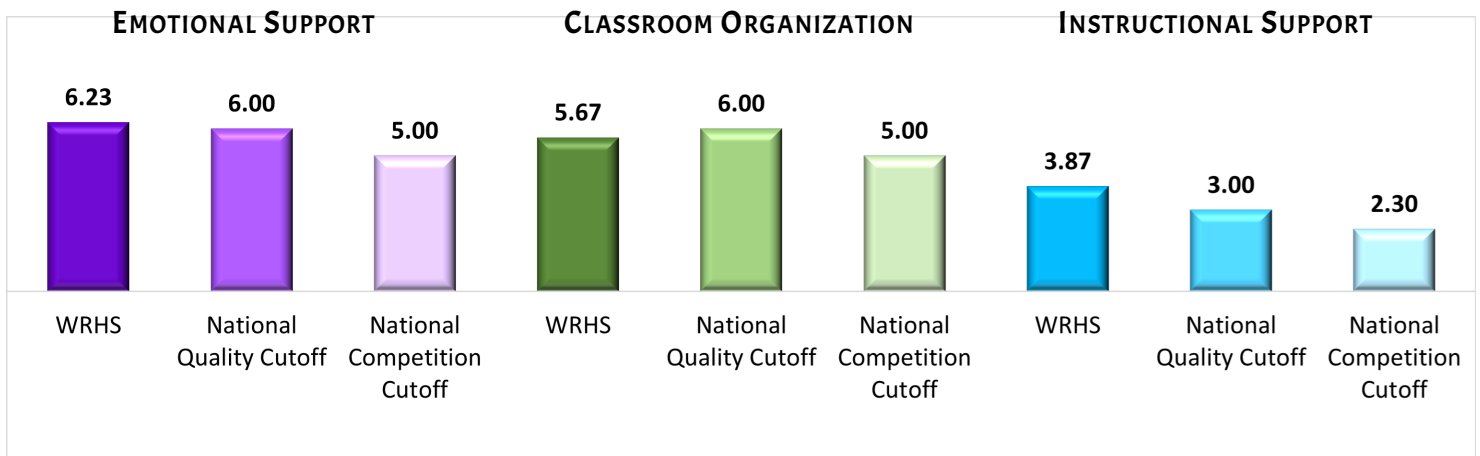
The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) is an observation instrument that assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions in center-based Head Start classrooms. The CLASS® dimensions are based on developmental theory and research suggesting that interactions between children and adults are the primary way of supporting children's development and learning, and that effective, engaging interactions and environments form the foundation for all learning in early childhood classrooms.

CLASS® includes three domains of teacher-child interactions that support learning and development:

- Emotional Support assesses the degree to which teachers establish and promote a positive climate in their classroom through their everyday interactions.
- Classroom Organization assesses classroom routines and procedures related to the organization and management of children's behavior, time, and attention in the classroom.
- Instructional Support assesses the ways in which teachers implement the curriculum to effectively promote cognitive and language development.

The two sets of thresholds for CLASS® scores include the quality thresholds and the competitive thresholds. If a Head Start program receives a score below the quality threshold for one or more of the CLASS® domains, OHS provides support for quality improvement by intentionally connecting the grantee to a variety of resources that align with areas where improvement is needed. If a grantee receives a score below the competitive threshold for one or more of the CLASS® domains, then the grantee is required to compete for continued funding.

## CLASS SCORES



## TEACHING STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Part of preparing children for school involves hiring qualified staff. Head Start teachers are required to have a degree in Early Childhood or related field. Teacher assistants are required to complete the Child Development Associate credential or be enrolled in a college program leading to a degree in Early Childhood Education.

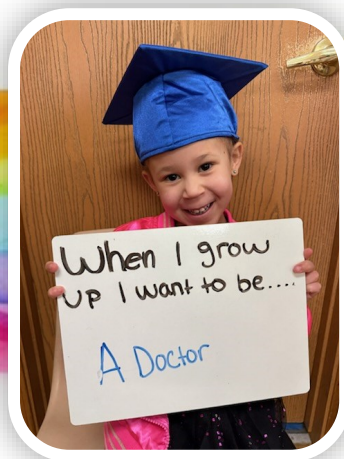
## OUR SCHOOL READINESS GOAL

West River Head Start's School Readiness Goal is a broad, comprehensive statement that is measured by skills from the Head Start Framework domains. The School Readiness survey included input from parents, staff, Policy Council members, HIT Board of Directors, and community members. The survey concluded that the most important skills needed for kindergarten success were social emotional skills.

**Children will adapt to new situations by exhibiting self-regulation strategies including impulse control and problem solving while expressing concern for self and care of others, maintaining focus, and attending to tasks creatively throughout their learning environment.**

Obj 1: West River Head Start staff will provide schedules, routines, and efficient transitions so children can effectively manage emotions while participating in activities.

Obj 2: Teaching staff will create a school family and use positive and proactive behavior strategies, so children are willing to help each other and contribute to being a safe keeper of their classroom.



## OUR PROGRAM GOALS

**Goal 1: WRHS will support ongoing learning and development of staff.**

Obj 1: *Decrease the number of resignations as of May 31st of each school year.*

Obj 2: *Increase the number of staff who further their education.*

**Goal 2: West River Head Start will continue to grow in the use of technology to improve systems.**

Obj 1: *Move from Google Docs to Office 365.*

Obj 2: *Move documents from HIT website to Office 365.*

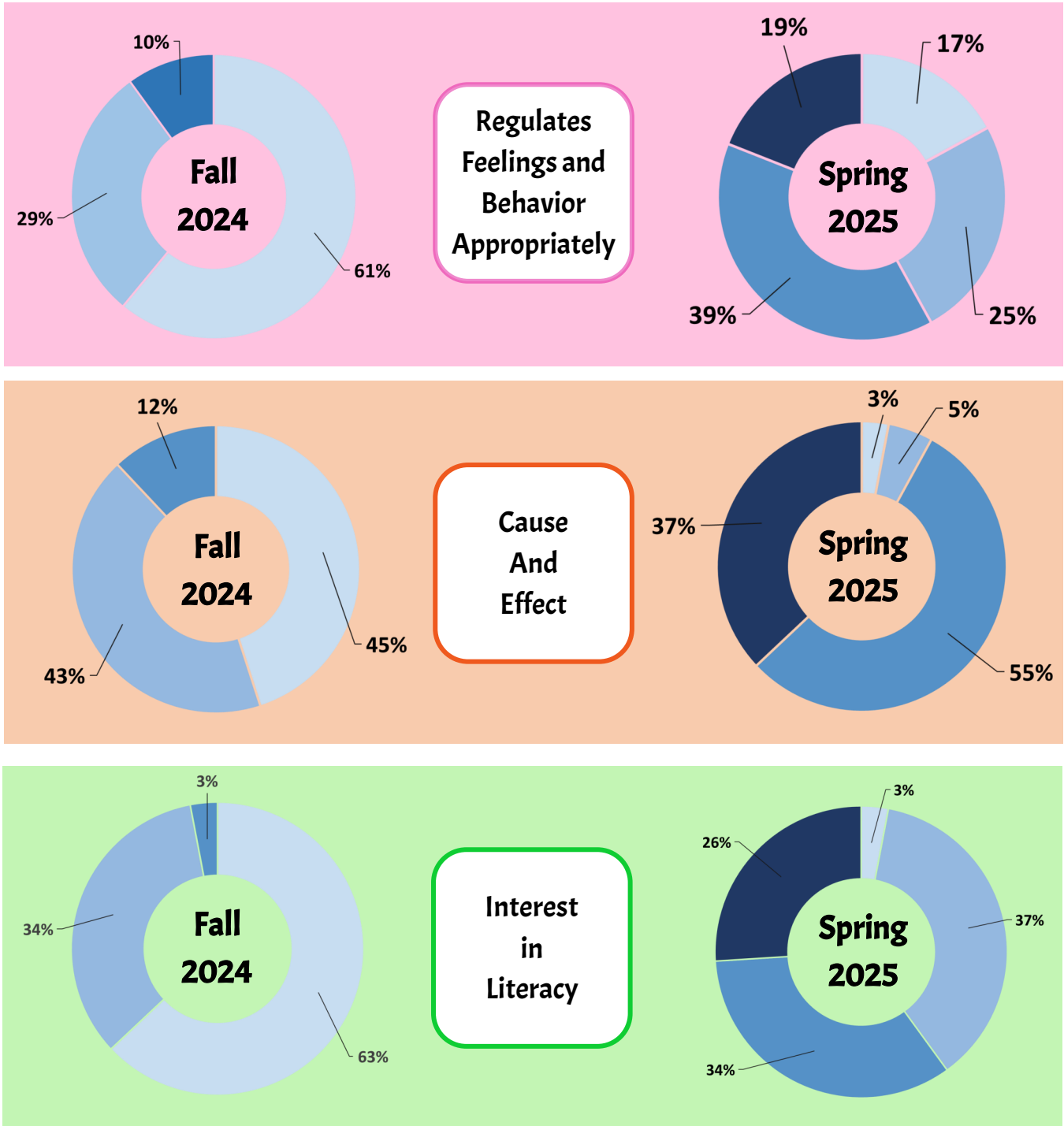
Obj 3: *Continue to grow in the capabilities of ChildPlus.*

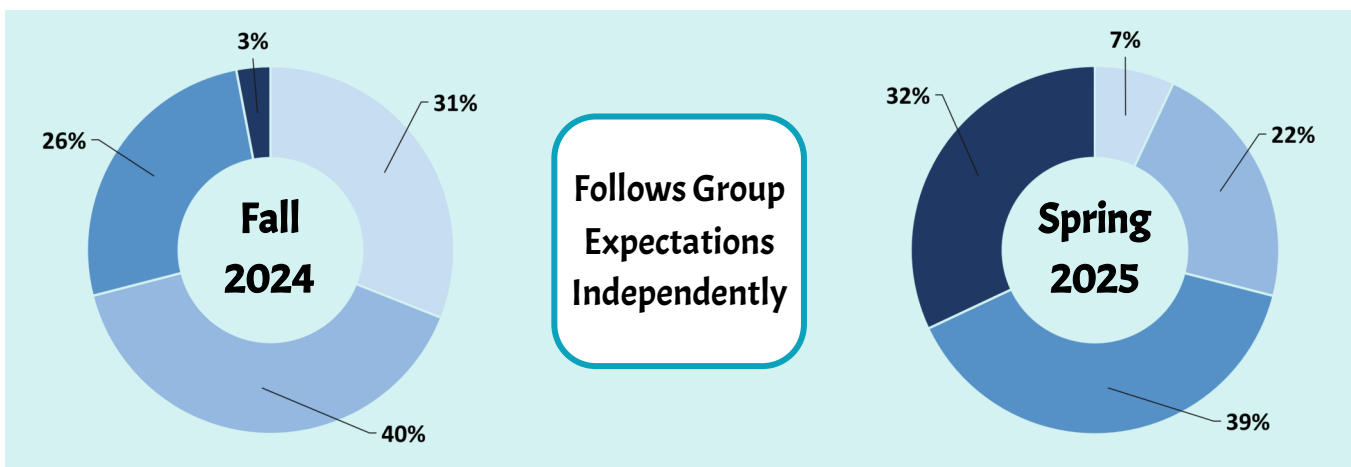
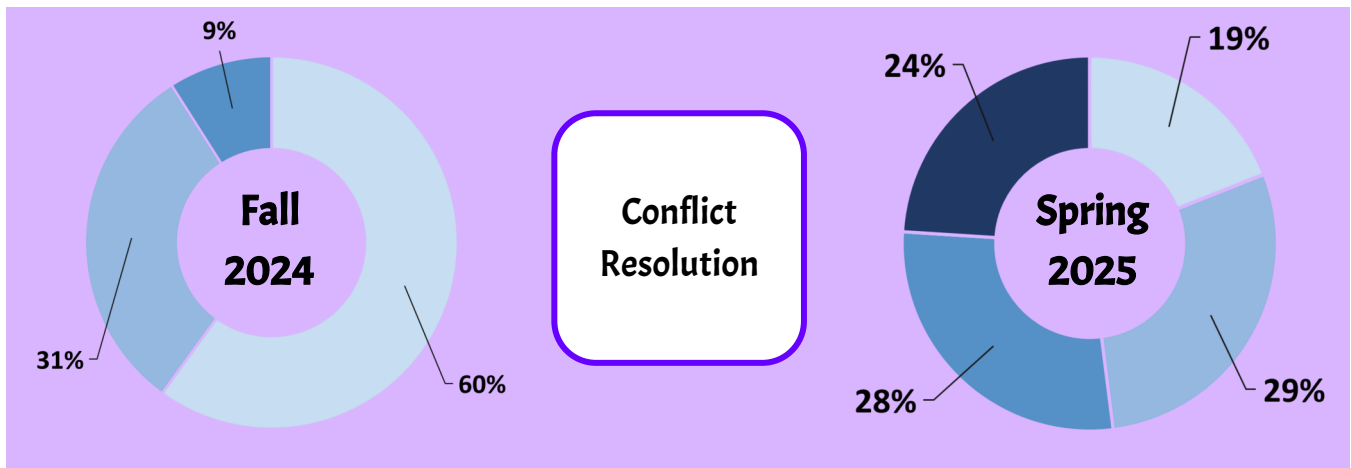
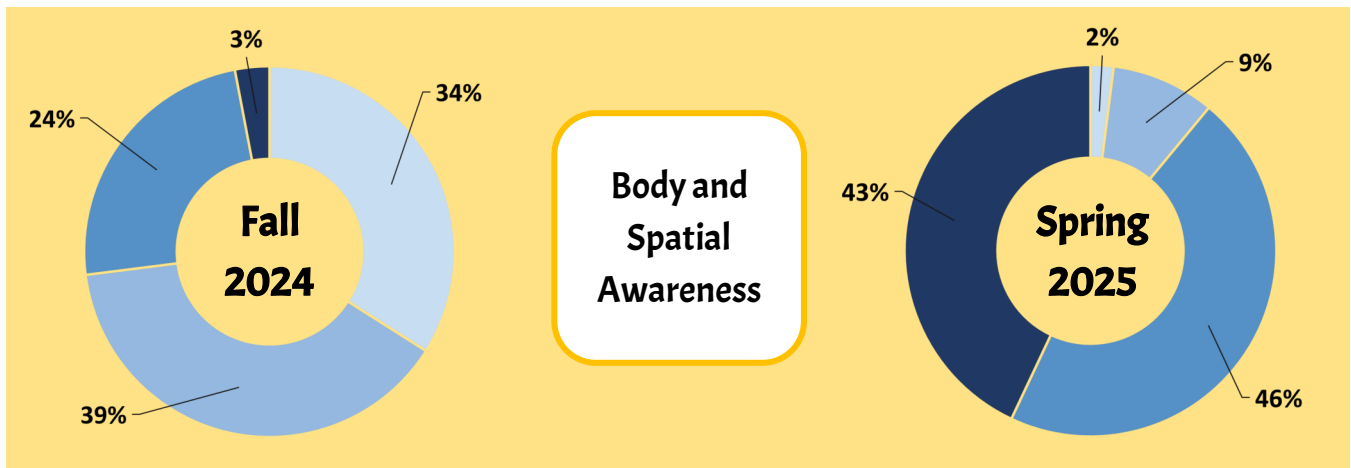
Obj 4: *Explore Relias as a training platform for the program.*

## SCHOOL READINESS GOAL ANALYSIS

The 2024–2025 program data shows the percentage of pre-kindergarten children at each developmental stage, from foundational skills to meeting kindergarten expectations, based on Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 assessments (58 children in each assessment period). As shown below, the lightest shade of blue decreases as children progress through higher levels of development and move closer to meeting kindergarten expectations. Six areas of development are represented in the pie charts to measure progress toward this goal.

■ Foundational ■ Building ■ Emerging ■ Meeting





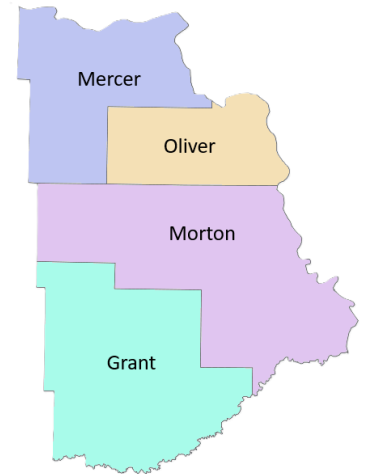
### SUMMARY POINTS

- ◆ *Interest in Literacy* had 63% of children in foundational skills when they entered West River Head Start and 3% at the end.
- ◆ *Body and Spatial Awareness* is our strongest category with 89% of children in the emerging and meeting category.
- ◆ *Regulates Feelings and Behavior Appropriately* and *Conflict Resolution* had the least children emerging or meeting kindergarten entry skills. Both measures influence the other, if a child is unable to regulate, conflict resolution is difficult.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

As a state, North Dakota's overall population has been increasing steadily since 2000. The World Population Review estimates North Dakota's has grown 1.35% from 2020 to 2022 moving the population up to 800,394 (21,300 more than the 2020 US Census report) and number two out of all 50 states for the highest birthrate.

Though the proportion of children is increasing in many of the larger communities in North Dakota, the elderly continue to remain high in smaller communities. For years North Dakota's population was referred to as the "Graying of North Dakota" as North Dakota's young people were leaving the state. The oil boom (2006-2012) brought jobs and young families back to North Dakota. The job market opportunities and low unemployment rank North Dakota 3<sup>rd</sup> (US Bureau of Labor Statistics November 2022) in comparison to other states, as young families choose to stay in the state. This has shifted North Dakota as a whole to be getting younger. North Dakota was recognized as the only state in the United States growing younger in the decade 2010 to 2018. North Dakota's median age dropped from 37 in 2010 to 35.2 in 2020 as the nation's median age continues to rise. North Dakota's decreasing median age ranks it as the 4<sup>th</sup> youngest state in the nation. Only Utah (31.1), Alaska (34.1) and Texas (34.8) are estimated to be younger than North Dakota (Statistical Atlas).



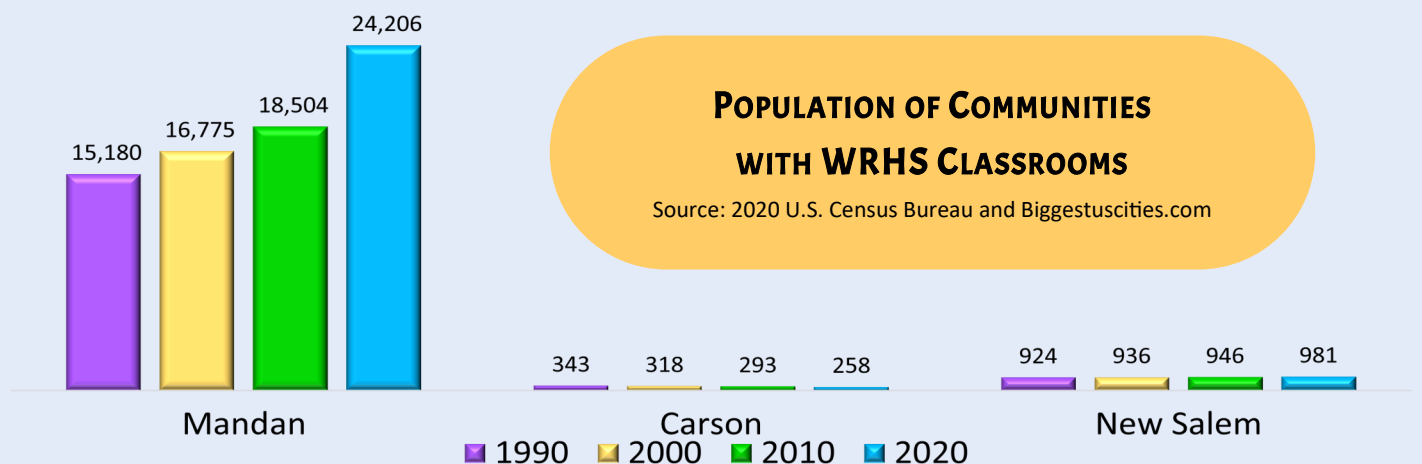
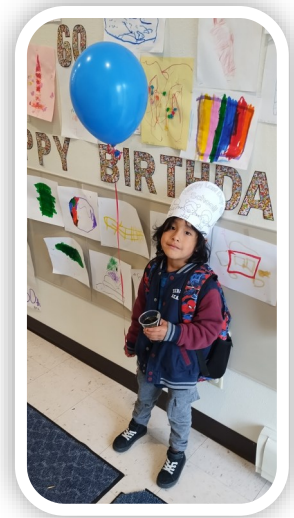
Counties served by WRHS have a higher median age than the state with Morton County at 37.6, Grant County at 48.2, and Oliver county at 48. Grant County is the only county that decreased its mean age from 53.3 to 48.2 in 2020, but it is still quite bit older than North Dakota's mean average.

Counties served by WRHS have a higher median age than the state with Morton County at 37.6, Grant County at 48.2, and Oliver county at 48. Grant County is the only county that decreased its mean age from 53.3 to 48.2 in 2020, but it is still quite bit older than North Dakota's mean average.

Similar to the nation's census data, North Dakota's child poverty is declining. The child poverty rate decreased from 14% in 2015 to 11.1% in 2020. Younger children in the state still have a higher poverty rate. The average percentage of children in poverty ages birth through 4 is higher than older children (ages 0 through 4 is 12.5%, ages 5 through 17 is 10.5%) (2022 KIDS Count Data Book).

North Dakota KIDS Count data indicates 1,788 (1.4%) students K-12 as homeless in 2020-2021, down from the median of 2,298 students in 2011-2021. There is no data for homeless children 0-5, but WRHS' historical data also reflects a decline in homeless children enrolled.

The population increase the communities served by West River Head Start is less than North Dakota's average with the exception of Mandan. The bar graph below provides a visual representation of WRHS communities from 1990 to the US Census for 2020.



# 60 YEARS *of* RESULTS

**HEAD START** | *Since 1965*

## **A HAND IN SHAPING A STRONG FUTURE FOR HEAD START**

Advocating is crucial to educate policy makers about the significant impact quality early childhood programs have on children's development, enabling them to make informed policy decisions that can positively affect the lives of children and families in their communities, particularly by advocating for funding and supporting initiatives that promote access to high-quality early care and education for all children.

Our director and assistant directors attended the National Head Start Association Winter Leadership Institute in Washington, DC, in January 2025. While there, they met with Senators Cramer and Hoeven and Representative Fedorchak to share the impactful work of Head Start programs, highlight parent success stories, and discuss challenges programs are facing. This provided a valuable opportunity to bring the life-changing work of Head Start to the forefront of our North Dakota congressional delegation's attention.

While our staff were in DC, the Trump administration initiated a temporary pause on a wide range of federal programs, including Head Start. An immediate halt to Head Start services would have had a significant impact on families who rely on these programs. Through swift action by the National Head Start Association and other Head Start advocates, funding was restored by the end of the day.

In April 2025, Head Start supporters continued advocating for funding after the initial proposed presidential budget called for eliminating the program. Although funding was ultimately restored at a level amount, advocates emphasized that level funding—without adjustments for inflation and rising costs—effectively results in a cut, potentially impacting services and staffing. Supporters continue to emphasize the importance of funding Head Start to ensure its continued success.



## **EARLY CHILDHOOD DAY**

Our program participated in the Early Childhood Day at the North Dakota State Capitol on January 30, 2025. The theme was "Legendary Starts Early." This event provides an opportunity for early childhood organizations to come together to connect with legislators and share the importance of early childhood programs, services, and supports across North Dakota. Connecting with our policymakers is important to ensure that every child and family gets the support they need to thrive.

## ANNUAL REPORT

This annual report has been prepared to comply with the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007. Information within the report pertains to fiscal year September 1, 2024, to August 31, 2025.

The act states each Head Start agency shall make available to the public a report published at least once in each fiscal year that discloses the following information from the most recently concluded fiscal year, except that reporting such information shall not reveal personally identifiable information about an individual child or parent:

- (A) The total amount of public and private funds received and the amount from each source.
- (B) An explanation of budgetary expenditures and proposed budget for the fiscal year.
- (C) The total number of children and families served, the average monthly enrollment (as a percentage of funded enrollment), and the percentage of eligible children served.
- (D) The results of the most recent review by the Secretary and the financial audit.
- (E) The percentage of enrolled children that received medical and dental exams.
- (F) Information about parent involvement activities.
- (G) The agency's efforts to prepare children for kindergarten.

Hard copies of our annual report are distributed to our community partners, local LEA's, local school districts, HIT Inc Board of Directors, and Policy Council. A digital copy is available on our website and Facebook page.



### OUR LOCATIONS

1004 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Mandan, ND 58554  
(701) 663-9507

407 N 5th Street  
New Salem, ND 58563  
(701) 843-8061

210 2nd Ave West  
Carson, ND 58529  
(701) 622-3505



### OUR GRANTEE

HIT, Inc. provides a variety of services to people with disabilities in western North Dakota.

### Our Vision

HIT, Inc. supports people with disabilities through self-directed services that promote independence, dignity, and respect.

### Our Mission

- We will strive to meet our customers' needs.
- We will serve as a catalyst in uniting our customers and the community.
- We will attract, retain, and motivate competent employees.
- We will effectively use resources in customer-driven activities.



<https://www.hitinc.org/services/WestRiverHeadStart>