

A festive wreath with a red bow, gold and silver ornaments, and pinecones hangs on a dark wooden door.

# HEAD START HAPPENINGS NEWSLETTER

WEST CENTRAL COMMUNITY ACTION  
DECEMBER 2025

A decorative sign that says "HELLO DECEMBER" in a rustic, hand-drawn style. It features oranges, cinnamon sticks, and pinecones.

## A word for the Director

Happy December! In November, members of our Leadership Team and Specialists came together for our November Data Review. Below I want to share a few positives, areas to work on, and potential action steps we are taking as a program to ensure continuous quality improvement:

**-CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System)(HS Only):** As a program, our strength is positive climates. The area of instructional support has made significant improvements, the team discussed this could be due to the focus on curriculum implementation fidelity. The team noted a continued trend with a decrease in the productivity and classroom organization scores. The following are the action steps the team will be implementing: gathering and reviewing additional data (what was ratio during observation, behavior management compared to BIR data), reviewing the coaching plan and implementing support, training for all staff on behavior management and classroom organization. See more below in the education news!

**-BIR's (Behavior Incident Reports):** At the time of the review, there is a total of 797 BIR's so far this school year, with 54 students having at least one BIR. The team noted that we feel we are getting good documentation from BIR's so far this year and working to develop support plans for classrooms and/or individual students. Almost every student that has 20 or more BIR's has a support plan in place. One opportunity or strategy that was discussed was having teachers utilize modeling and teaching during small group times to follow up with challenging behaviors. See below in the Support Services section for more in-depth review of data related to BIR's.

**-Creative Curriculum Fidelity Checklist:** This tool monitors that we are implementing the Creative Curriculum with fidelity as required by the Head Start Performance Standards. All weighted totals for HS and EHS met or exceeded the requirement of 80%, way to go! Scores in EHS overall seem to be lower program-wide and it was discussed that some pieces of the curriculum are not being utilized consistently (discussion cards, Hello Books, and Mighty Minutes). An action step was discussed to continue to monitor the use of the EHS curriculum during regular monitoring visits.

**-Incident Accident Reports:** This is a new area this team will be monitoring for any trends that need to be addressed. Overall, at this time there were no required actions at this time.

**-Fall Family Surveys:** The team was pleased to see we received back 73 surveys! Overall, the survey had great results and parents had wonderful things to say. The action steps that will be taken: getting procedures into place for Learning Genie to ensure all staff know how to implement and create a snapshot of the family survey data to share with staff, Policy Council, and Governing Board (we want staff to see the great things parents are saying). Be on the look out for the snapshot of these results soon, but wonderful job!

**-Attendance:** Overall, the team noted an improvement in the number of students that are chronically absent. Sick is the highest absence reason, followed by home with family. The team noted there is not a lot of the daily documentation being completed for when

parents call in, or it is documented in the wrong place. Overall, tardiness is an increasing issue identified, especially in Council Bluffs. We were able to look at attendance action plan data this round, which is good see Family Advocates have started these. Program-wide, we have 29 chronically absent children and 13 attendance plans. The following action steps were identified: monitor tardiness specifically by center, retrain staff on attendance plans.

Lastly, I wanted to take a moment to say thank you to all our staff! Your hard work and dedication to children and families is admirable and appreciated. I hope you all can take time over the holidays with friends and family and hopefully taking some time to relax! Happy Holidays!



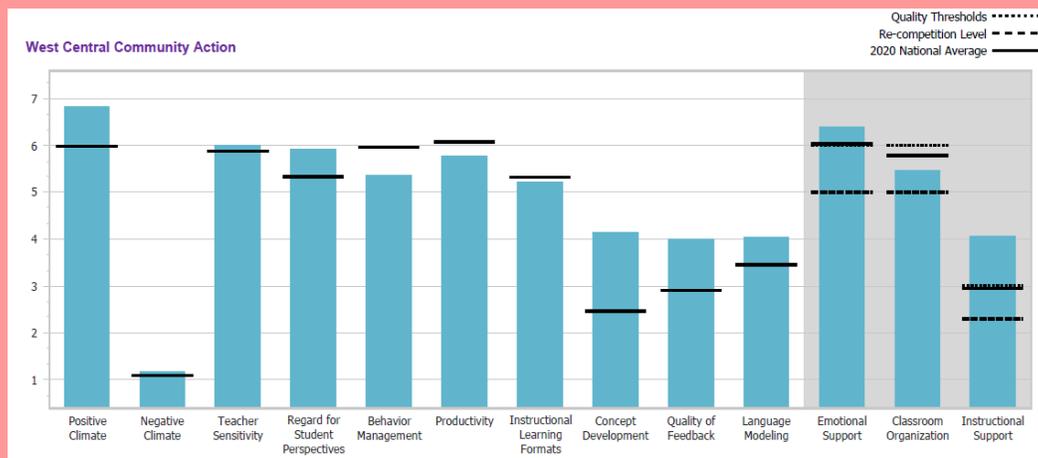
Danni Segebart, Head Start Director

## Education News

It is hard to believe that we are almost halfway through this school year already. I hope each of you were able to spend a little time relaxing with loved ones over the Thanksgiving break.

On November 21, 2025, teaching staff wrapped up their first GOLD checkpoint for the FALL term. I would love to say that I have the GOLD data all analyzed and ready to share with all of you, but unfortunately, it is not. I will hopefully have it all analyzed and ready to share with you in the January newsletter. GOLD data is super important, and I look forward to sharing our program's overall snapshot reports to show what percentage of the children are meeting, exceeding, or falling below the expectations. Great job to teaching staff for getting this done accurately and on time! Your hard work does not go unnoticed, and you are appreciated!

I would like to share our Fall CLASS data for our stand-alone centers. As you can see, our stand alone Head Start classrooms are falling below the national average for behavior management, productivity, and instructional learning formats which puts our program below the quality thresholds in classroom organization. As a result, we plan to provide some training around behavior management and classroom organization.



Finally, the holidays can make it hard to remember to stop and take time for yourself, but please do so. You must take care of yourself before you can take care of others. I hope you all have a wonderful month and a joyous holiday season with your friends and families. 😊

"Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better." *Maya Angelou*

*Jennifer Duff*, Education Manager

### **From the Nurse's Desk...**

I found this article and thought it was a good share to explain the trend in Hand Food and Mouth Disease which we have seen in many classrooms this fall. Iowa was not listed specifically as a state that had a surging trend but it was noted across the US as well.

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease Surging in Some States — Public health and pediatric infectious disease experts weigh in on the uptick in cases by Jennifer Henderson, Enterprise & Investigative Writer, MedPage Today November 20, 2025

Physicians and public health experts in a number of states in the mid-Atlantic region are reporting an uptick in hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD). Epic Research reported a three-fold rise in medically-attended (evaluated by a medical provider) HFMD across the U.S., compared with the year prior, and double the rate from 2023.

HFMD, which is caused by enteroviruses such as coxsackievirus, can occur among people of all ages, but it is particularly common in children, especially those younger than 5 years, according to the CDC. It is characterized by flu-like symptoms, mouth sores, and rash on the hands and feet, as well as the buttocks, legs, and arms.

HFMD primarily spreads in the summer and fall, though it can occur any time of year. While most cases are considered mild and resolve within 7 to 10 days, there can be rare complications, such as dehydration, fingernail and toenail loss, viral meningitis, and even encephalitis or paralysis.

"When we look at trends reported this year, there is a more pronounced uptick in outbreaks and in visits to emergency departments and urgent care centers compared to prior years," Dawn Saady, deputy director of the Division of Surveillance and Investigation in the Office of Epidemiology at the Virginia Department of Health, told MedPage Today. (Individual cases of HFMD are not reportable to the health department, but outbreaks are.)

"During a typical year, we might see 45 to 65 outbreaks reported per year, and then this year, in 2025, we have had -- so far -- 198 outbreaks of hand, foot, and mouth disease reported," Saady said of Virginia specifically. "It is a significant uptick."

Of the outbreaks in that state, 99% have been in K-12 schools and child care centers, she noted. When looking at the percentage of visits to emergency departments and urgent care centers due to HFMD in recent years, the figure peaked at more than 4.5% in June of this year, Saady said.

Though it's difficult to specify the exact cause of this year's uptick, there may be several potential factors to point to, she said. First, because enteroviruses tend to spread more easily in warm temperatures and high humidity, the recent trend "could be influenced by environmental conditions," Saady said. Additionally, "activities where kids are very close together and sharing respiratory droplets can contribute to spread," such as at summer day camps and school.

Furthermore, there are different strains of enterovirus that can cause HFMD, and "changes in circulating strains could contribute to increased spread," she continued. Because last year was a relatively mild year for HFMD, "it is possible that those young kids who were not infected last year were part of this season's spike."

Other experts offered similar possibilities. "Really over the last 5 years post-pandemic, this is the largest peak that we have probably seen since 2019, 2020," Matthew Thomas, MD, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist at West Virginia University Medicine Golisano Children's Hospital in Morgantown, told MedPage Today.

However, the rise in cases is not necessarily unusual in comparison to trends with other respiratory viruses, he said. There will be "periods of this every few years where there will be a little more of an unusual spike."

"It could be that our practices as people are different, but it could also be that the virus that is flowing through our community right now is a little bit different than what the population has seen before," Thomas added.

Dean Blumberg, MD, chief of pediatric infectious diseases at the University of California Davis Children's Hospital in Sacramento, also pointed to possible contributing factors like warmer temperatures and higher humidity, a different circulating strain, and a potential immunity gap coming out of the pandemic.

Overall, "I think there is always concern," Blumberg told MedPage Today. "Fortunately, the vast majority of cases are mild, self-limited, and don't result in any long-term problems whatsoever. But a small number of cases will result in more severe disease."

According to the CDC, HFMD can be contracted in the following ways: having contact with droplets that contain virus particles after an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks  
Touching an infected person or having close contact like kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils  
Touching an infected person's feces, such as when changing diapers, and then touching one's eyes, nose, or mouth  
Touching objects and surfaces that have the virus on them, like doorknobs or toys, and then touching the eyes, nose, or mouth.

Handwashing is key to avoid transmission, Thomas said. When it comes to clinician messaging around HFMD this season, "it is mostly raising awareness that it is very prevalent in our community, so it is more likely that you are going to encounter it, so that we can be vigilant and take care of our kids as it comes," he said. This is especially true "leading into the holiday season." "Kids are going to come into contact with one another; it is very spreadable," he noted.

Dianne Blum, Health Coordinator

## **In-Kind (Non-Federal Match) Update:**

Shout out to Red Oak EHS – October collection amount came to nearly ½ of the entire EHS amount! There is still some paper from October that needs to be entered, so if it seems low, don't fret! If you would like to know where you stand in Learning Genie, please don't forget that you can check the In-Kind Goals to see how much has been submitted in a current month.

**Total-EHS: \$22,004.68**

**Total- HS: \$20,890.05**

### **Learning Genie Collection numbers:**

Atlantic – \$833.57

Council Bluffs 1 – \$268.59

Council Bluffs 2 – \$1,338.32

Denison 1 – \$325.97

Denison 2 – \$396.23

EHS HB 1 – \$34.34

EHS HB 2 – \$158.68

EHS HB 3 – \$743.35

Den EHS HB 1 – \$562.37

Den EHS HB 2 – \$747.60

Harlan HS – \$2,068.19  
 Mapleton HS – \$3,005.68  
 Mills Co – \$2,757.72  
 Red Oak HS – \$8,546.76

Harlan EHS 1 – \$4,657.93  
 Harlan EHS 2 – \$953.95  
 Madison EHS 1 – \$1,135.77  
 Madison EHS 2 – \$1,719.76  
 Red Oak EHS – \$10,232.13

Keep up the great work and if you have ideas to share with others on how you are collecting in-kind, please share!

## ERSEA Corner...

### Attendance Matters - Thank You, Team!

As we continue working toward our program-wide attendance goals, your role is essential. The relationships you build with families, the warm welcomes each morning, and the follow-up you provide all play a major role in keeping children and families engaged in the program. As we move into a new month and with the anticipation of the Holiday season, please continue to document absences, communicate concerns early, and partner with families who may be facing barriers. Your commitment directly impacts each child's school readiness, and we appreciate everything you do! Your efforts help keep our program full, stable, and ready for learning each day.

# ATTENDANCE

## in the early grades

Many of our youngest students miss 10 percent of the school year—about 18 days a year or just two days every month. Chronic absenteeism in kindergarten, and even preK, can predict lower test scores, poor attendance and retention in later grades, especially if the problem persists for more than a year. Do you know how many young children are chronically absent in your school or community?



### Who Is Affected

Kindergarten and 1st grade classes often have absenteeism rates as high as those in high school. Many of these absences are excused, but they still add up to lost time in the classroom.

1 in 10 kids in kindergarten and 1st grade are chronically absent. In some schools, it's as high as 1 in 4.<sup>1</sup>



2 in 10 low-income kids miss too much school. They're also more likely to suffer academically.<sup>2</sup>



2.5 in 10 homeless kids are chronically absent.<sup>2</sup>



4 in 10 transient kids miss too much school when families move.<sup>3</sup>

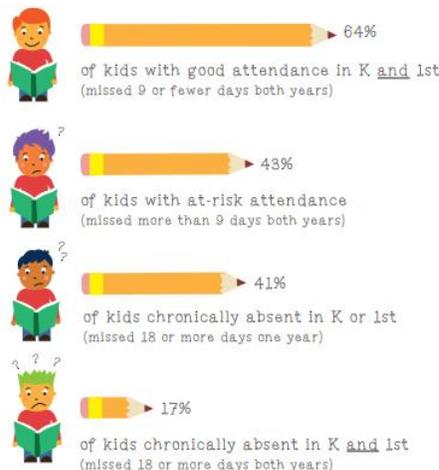


### Why It Matters

If children don't show up for school regularly, they miss out on fundamental reading and math skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers.

Preliminary data from a California study found that children who were chronically absent in kindergarten and 1st grade were far less likely to read proficiently at the end of 3rd grade.<sup>3</sup>

#### Who Can Read on Grade Level After 3rd Grade?<sup>3</sup>



### What We Can Do



#### Engage Families

Many parents and students don't realize how quickly early absences can add up to academic trouble. Community members and teachers can educate families and build a culture of attendance through early outreach, incentives and attention to data.



#### Fix Transportation

The lack of a reliable car, or simply missing the school bus, can mean some students don't make it to class. Schools, transit agencies and community partners can organize car pools, supply bus passes or find other ways to get kids to school.



#### Address Health Needs

Health concerns, particularly asthma and dental problems, are among the leading reasons students miss school in the early grades. Schools and medical professionals can work together to give children and families health care and advice.



#### Track the Right Data

Schools too often overlook chronic absence because they track average attendance or unexcused absences, not how many kids miss too many days for any reason. Attendance Works has free data-tracking tools.

These are a few steps that communities and schools can take. How do you think you can help?

<sup>1</sup> Chang, Hedy; Romero, Mariajose, Present, *Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty: NY, September 2008.  
<sup>2</sup> *Chronic Absence in Utah*, Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Association with Student Characteristics, School Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes*, Applied Survey Research, May 2011.

## **A word from the PBIS Team...**

Our PBIS Team met last month and looked at our Program-Wide TPOT (Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool) data and scores for our Head Start classrooms. These observations were done on each of our 9 Head Start Stand-alone classrooms. Our overall score was 86% which is great! Some of the areas that our classrooms scored the highest in were:

1. Schedules, Routines & Activities – This area looks at things like if there's a posted visual daily schedule that teachers refer to throughout the day, the activities are engaging and structured for both large and small group times, and children that need extra support to follow the routines are provided with that support.
2. Interventions for Children with Challenging Behaviors- This section is part of the interview portion of the tool. All 9 lead teachers scored 100% in this section. The questions that are asked in this section ask about the steps and procedures for what teachers in our program do when they have children with severe and persistent challenging behaviors. Our teachers know that when children have challenging behaviors in their classrooms, their first step is documenting behaviors with BIRs or filling out a Request for Support form. When behaviors continue, we utilize our Functional Behavior Assessment process and procedure to team with families, develop behavior support and intervention plans, and refer children for further assessment and evaluation as needed.
3. Connecting with Families- This section is also part of the interview portion and gives our teachers an opportunity to share out some of the ways they promote family involvement in their classrooms, and how they communicate with families.
4. Supporting Family Use of the Pyramid Model Practices- Monthly classroom newsletters, PBIS postcards, PBIS letters, PBIS trifolds, conferences, sending notes home, phone calls, and support from our Support Services Coordinator and Behavior Specialist, our teachers shared how they help families connect PBIS and the Pyramid Model practices at home.

We also looked at some areas we could improve on. These included

1. Teaching Behavior Expectations
2. Teaching Social Skills & Emotional Competencies

Both of these areas are incredibly important for preventing and addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom. Teaching behavior expectations includes things like: having the program-wide expectations posted, reviewing these with children (like during circle time), and reminding of these expectations throughout the day. Commenting on when children are behaving appropriately with specific positive descriptive feedback and facilitating discussions with children to help them think critically about their behaviors are also crucial practices for teaching behavior expectations.

Many children come into our classrooms with very limited social experiences which can lead to challenging behaviors in the classroom. Classrooms that intentionally teach children things like how to regulate their strong emotions, how to play cooperatively with their peers, and how to solve social problems have few behaviors.

There are lots of resources and visuals in the classroom PBIS kits that can aid teachers in teaching children these skills. All of the resources in the classroom PBIS kit, plus many more resources can

also be found in this google folder:

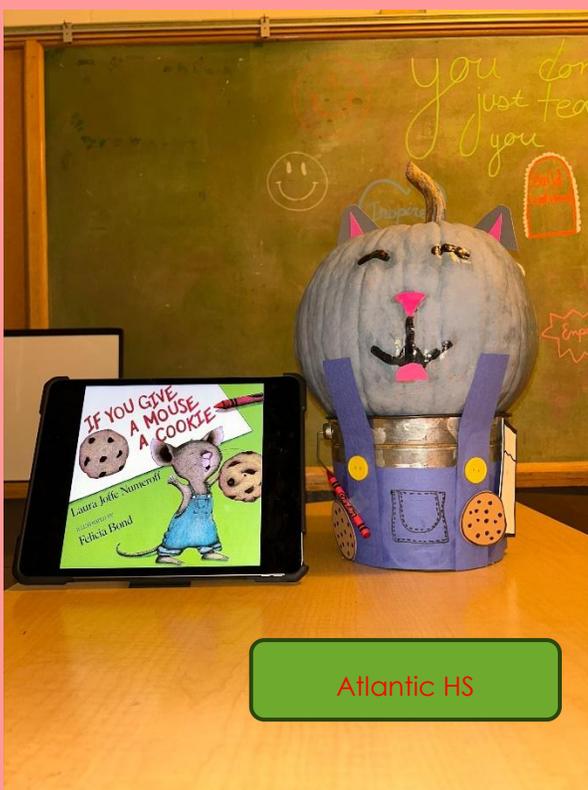
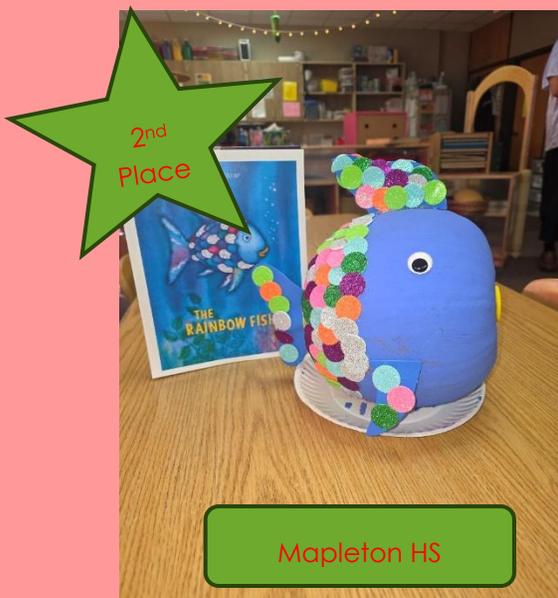
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Reach out to Jill Willenborg or Jenny Armstrong if you ever need more visuals, ideas, or support in implementing PBIS and Pyramid Model practices in your classroom!

Your PBIS Team

## Wellness Committee Update!

We received 6 AMAZING pumpkin contest entries. Thank you so much to everyone who participated, we hope you had fun too! We can't wait to see the Winter Doors!





Thank you from the Wellness Committee!

## New Employee Spotlight

**David Peterson** started this month as our new Programs Operations Coordinator. David will office in Denison, but cover the ten-county area. "In my free time I can be fond somewhere in a river looking for fossils and artifacts. I enjoy all high school and collegiate sports. I have 8 grandchildren that I enjoy spending time with." Welcome to the Head Start team David!



**Isabel (Izzy) Segebart** started as the new Assistant Teacher in Harlan Head Start. Her favorite hobbies are arts and crafts, hunting, video games, and fishing. She has a younger sister (17), a younger brother (5), and her mom adopted her youngest sister (1), so she is the oldest of three. She has been working with kids for two years now and also had experience babysitting her siblings for over 10 years. She has a dog named Ryder (6) and a kitty named Luci (6 months). Welcome to Head Start Izzy!



## Staff Shout-out's

Please help us recognize and shout-out your co-workers and submit any shout-outs to [dsegebart@westcca.org](mailto:dsegebart@westcca.org).

Huge Shout out to the Harlan Head Start and Early Head Start staff! We have a group of high school students working on their CDA's and the Harlan staff have all been amazing at welcoming them into their classrooms! We appreciate your support in assisting with growing the Early Childhood workforce.

Misty Max - Misty is a strong asset to the Head Start program. She has a genuine passion for the children and families we serve and goes above and beyond in all aspects of her role as a Family Advocate. Thank you for all that you do!

Shout out to Bridgette Laver as she learns new skills to screen children's vision and hearing in classrooms while juggling other various job duties!

Shari Heese - Shari has jumped into the program with both feet and is always ready to learn and take on new tasks. We are so happy to have her on the Head Start team and I cannot wait to see how she continues to grow with the program!

Shout out to Red Oak EHS – October In Kind collection amount came to nearly ½ of the entire EHS amount!

**Paula Nagel** for getting all the physicals scheduled with families and sent in.

Way to GO!

**Lori Glissman** for her efforts in getting children in for dental exams. **Way to GO!**

I just want to give a **huge** shout out to Madison EHS 1 for attendance in November. **All children were present 90% or more for the month.** That's amazing. 😊 Your consistency, communication and care make a huge impact. When students show up every day, they're able to learn and grow in our program.

# Work Anniversaries

Chris Wessel, Home Based Teacher, 32 years

Jeanne Hansen, Home Based Teacher, 5 years

Jenna Orr, Council Bluffs School Partners Family Advocate, 1 year

**Congratulations to all on your accomplishments and thank you for your continued dedication to children and families!**

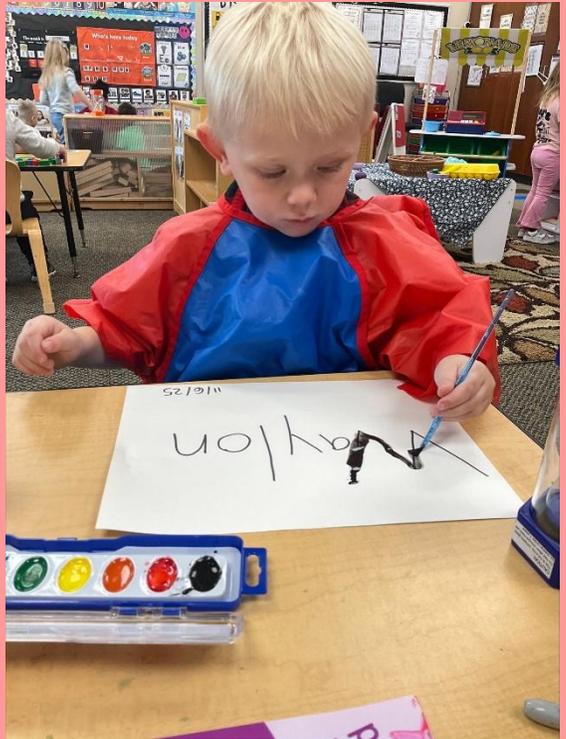
# Head Start Happenings.....

Red Oak did a story book parade for parents, and sat down and read the book with Superman, the police officers and families.



Mills County Head Start having fun!





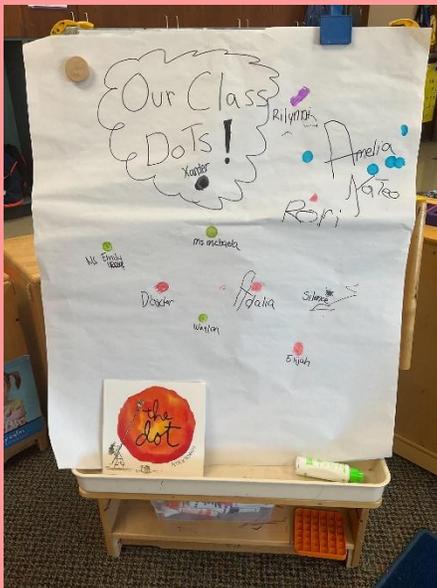
One of our program goals is building the Early Childhood workforce, and one way we do that is allowing opportunities to learn more about children and our program to students in a variety of ways. This year we have partnered with Ignite out of Woodbine to expose high school students to the Head Start world. In November, they came and toured and volunteered at our Harlan Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms.



Red Oak was studying pets. They had some chickens and goats come visit their classroom. They got to bottle feed the goats and pet the chickens.



During their study, they also had a pet pig come visit. They got feed it apples and they learned that some pigs get to stay in houses with people instead of a barn.



Mills County Head Start did their third read aloud for the book the dot and it was so much fun. The class made their own class dots!

Mills County Head Start gave the kids their own problem solution cards to use during center time when problems arise and they are doing so good with it.



### Fun in Mapleton



Building his own house



The school had a visit from the Iowa state patrol and let us explore their vehicle and try on their vest and hat



MVAO PTO held a fundraiser during Parent teacher conferences to raise money for activities. The parents and children could purchase a temporary tattoo for their teachers to wear. At the end of the week the kids got to tattoo their teacher.



Ms Brenda, Mapleton Head Start Teacher, got to meet Tucker Turtle at the Pyramid Model Consortium training in Illinois.

The rest of the pictures are from their field trip to the pumpkin patch





Mills County introduced their Kindness Tree to the kids. They are going to decorate it with different ways we can be kind in the classroom. ☺

### Events/ Dates to Remember

- December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025- Early Dismissal
- December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025- Early Dismissal
- December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025- Early Dismissal
- December 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025- Holiday

## Staff Birthdays...

December 1<sup>st</sup>- David Peterson, Program Operations Coordinator

December 17<sup>th</sup>- Danni Segebart, Head Start Director

December 17<sup>th</sup>- Samantha Villalovos, Harlan EHS Teacher

December 19<sup>th</sup>- Jasmin Marron, Denison Assistant Teacher

December 21<sup>st</sup>- Jennifer Rodriguez, Red Oak EHS Teacher

December 23<sup>rd</sup>- Melissa Kaye, Council Bluffs Teacher



\*\*If you notice that I have missed you, or someone else's birthday, please let me know. That means it is not in our Child Plus system correctly. Thanks for your help!

## Open Positions:

- Harlan Early Head Start Teacher Floater
- Harlan Early Head Start Teacher
- Early Head Start Council Bluffs Floater
- Traveling Assistant Teacher Floater (Council Bluffs or Harlan)
- Education Support Coordinator- Red Oak and Mills County
- Early Head Start Home Based Visitor
- Assistant Teacher Denison
- Assistant Teacher Council Bluffs
- Head Start Teacher Red Oak

**\*\*IF YOU KNOW OF ANYONE INTERESTED, ENCOURAGE THEM TO APPLY AT  
[HTTPS://WWW.WESTCENTRALCA.ORG/CAREERS](https://www.westcentralca.org/careers)**