



HEAD START HAPPENINGS NEWSLETTER

WEST CENTRAL COMMUNITY ACTION

FEBRUARY 2026



A word for the Director

Happy February! January has flown by! January & February are always the month that we officially kick off our planning for the next school year. February 2nd officially kicked-off our recruitment season for the 2026-2027 school year (that is crazy to say!) Please help us spread the word that we are now taking applications. Also, we are still taking applications for the 2025-2026 school as we need to get fully enrolled for Early Head Start and maintain full enrollment for Head Start. Happy recruiting!

In January, we hosted Policy Council on the 8th. We did meet our required number of families to attend to meet quorum, but please help us encourage families on the council to attend these meetings regularly. Also, we do have some vacancies with our Policy Council, so we need your help getting those positions filled. If you are unsure if your area has any vacancies, please reach out to Jennifer Tiarks at jtiarks@westcca.org. Our next meeting will be March 12th at 5:30. Have a great month!

Danni Segebart, Head Start Director

Education News

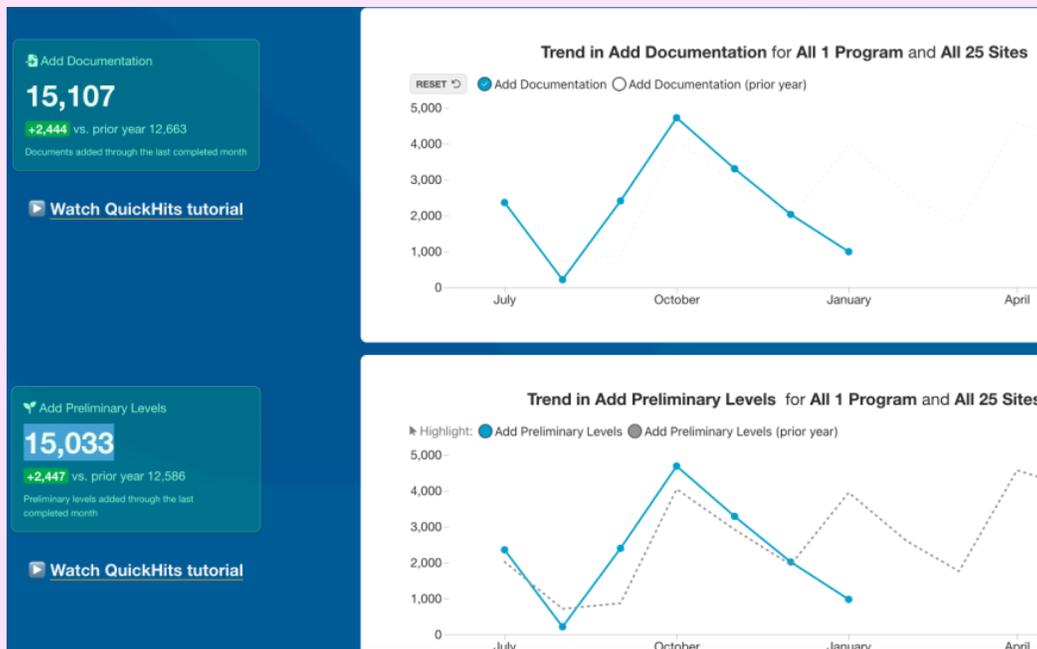
I wanted to start off by reminding everyone of how important it is to be kind and to have grace for one another this month. We all know life can be hard and everyone is struggling with something even if you don't see or hear about it. I just want to say how lucky we are to have such a great team! As always, there are lots of things happening in the Head Start world.



On a larger scale, "Read Across America" is fast approaching, or as some of you know it, Dr. Seuss's Birthday! We all know how important literacy is every day of the week, what are you doing to celebrate literacy during Dr. Seuss's Birthday week? Please share your ideas and pictures with Danni Segebart for the newsletter, we love seeing and hearing about your creativity in your classrooms☺

Classroom staff are doing a fantastic job of getting all GOLD data entered for the Winter checkpoint. We will be finishing up our WINTER checkpoint this month with GOLD data being due by 2-13-26 and Finalization Due by 2-20-26. Your supervisors and I will be monitoring to make sure we are staying on track to make our WINTER checkpoint as successful as FALL. Education staff have begun completing 2nd conference

Next I wanted to share our program's trend report for data entry into the GOLD assessment. At this time last year, staff entered 12,663 anecdotal notes. As of January 26, 2026, our program staff have entered 15,107 anecdotal notes.



I will not be observing in Head Start Classrooms for CLASS this Spring due to the Office of Head Start completing our federal CLASS observations in February/March 2026. I am excited for all of you to shine brightly. I have no doubt that you will all do a great job!

The Creative Curriculum has had some updates that I wanted to share with you. As January 20, 2026, there have been updates to the Library and Teach areas in Smart Teach:

- *7 ALL-NEW Studies, such as Blocks, Weather, and Restaurants, and more.
- *100 NEW Mighty Minutes.
- *29 NEW Spanish Language & Literacy Intentional Teaching Experiences.
- *50 NEW Book Discussion Cards

If you haven't had a chance to check these updates out, please do. It looks like some fun new studies the kiddos will enjoy!

Lastly, I wanted to end on a note of gratitude. I wanted to share how much I appreciate the things all of you do every day with Head Start children and families. The work you do is not easy work, but the reward of working with the children and families is so worth it! I love hearing all your stories of success and I cannot wait to continue this journey.

"KINDNESS: Loaning someone your strength instead you of reminding them of their weaknesses." *The Minds Journal*

Jennifer Duff, Education Manager

Support Services Corner...

Educational Disabilities and IEPs

As most of you know, within our program if you or a family has concerns about a child's development, speech, or behavior you can fill out a Request for Support form to notify the Support Services Coordinator (that's me!) and make sure we can address the concern and determine next steps. When I get a Request for Support form, I start gathering more information, see what data and other information we have a might need. If we are thinking an AEA referral might be needed to see if the child may qualify for an IEP, we have to provide data that would

meet one of 4 conditions for the AEA to complete an evaluation. Here's the breakdown and some examples of each of these conditions. Note- only one of these 4 needs to be met for the AEA to move forward with the child's evaluation.

Condition 1: This one says that if a child has a **diagnosis** of a disability **and** that disability is **affecting their educational performance**, the team should suspect an Educational Disability and move forward with an evaluation. As with all of these conditions, there has to be data and documentation to show this. For example, if a child has an autism diagnosis AND they are struggling in the classroom with say their communication or behavior, we might be able to meet this condition for that child. We would need some data- maybe BIRs showing that their behaviors are happening more frequently than other kids, or a speech checklist showing that they have fewer words than they would be expected to have for their age, or their GOLD report showing the child is below the color band for several domains.

Condition 2: This one looks at if the child is **not meeting standards** and is **unique** when compared to peers. While this seems pretty straight forward, data is the key! We would have to be able to show documentation of not meeting standards- for example if they have a very low score in an area on their ASQ, or their GOLD shows this. The "uniqueness" can get tricky with this one. Maybe you have a child in your classroom that is having a lot of disruptive or challenging behaviors. We might be able to show some data with their ASQ-SE2 of several noted concerns and if they are low in their social-emotional development from their GOLD, however, if there are a lot of other children in the same classroom with similar behaviors, it would be harder to say that that child is truly "unique".

Condition 3: This one looks at if we have data to show that the child has **received high-quality instruction** (a formal intervention) **and** the child is **not making progress** with that intervention. Again, DATA. For this condition to be met, we would need to develop an individual intervention for the child, and collect data on that intervention. For example, say you have a child that you have concerns that they're hard to understand when they speak. We would need to develop a specific intervention, implement that, and collect data over several weeks to determine if they are making progress.

Condition 4: This one is similar to the last one and says the child has received **high-quality instruction** (or intervention) and the child is making progress with that intervention but **requires a continued and substantial effort** that might include special education services to continue that progress. An example of this might be if a child's speech has improved with an intervention to target a specific sound, but progress is slow, and they might need more specialized support from a Speech and Language Pathologist to provide speech therapy. Another example might be if a child does well if they have 1:1 support but really struggles in the large group of the classroom.

As always, if you have concerns with a child's development or behavior, you can fill out and send in a Request for Support form found on the H Drive, or reach out for support!

Jill Willenborg, Support Services Coordinator

From the Nurse's Desk...

Excerpts from: How to Embrace Feedback (Without Getting Defensive)

Written by
Stephanie Fallon
January 26, 2026

So often, we receive feedback — whether at home, in our social circles, or at work — as an attack. Maybe we feel misunderstood, or like our actions were unfairly interpreted. Maybe feeling like we disappointed someone or didn't meet their expectations triggers a bone-deep fear about our self-worth. Or maybe we simply weren't prepared to hear something hard, and our defensiveness is a reaction to being uncomfortable.

Defensiveness in the face of criticism and feedback about our behaviors, performance, or actions might feel like a natural response, but it almost always does more harm than good — both to our relationships and also to ourselves. After all, we are responsible for our behaviors, words, and actions. It is appropriate to be held accountable to them, and we should want to improve in these areas, right?

Here's the truth: We will all do and say things in every area of our lives that will require redirection. It is unreasonable to expect that we — or anyone else — will always do the exact right thing at the exact right time in the exact right way. If indeed we want to do, say, and be "perfect" in every scenario, the irony is that we have to expect that we won't be, while continuing to try anyway.

And then we have to actively invite the feedback we need to help us improve.

One of the greatest disservices we have done to ourselves as a culture is stigmatizing failure. Any perceived failure in our lives can feel like a badge of shame, something heavy and cumbersome we're trying to keep hidden. If someone happens to see it, we do whatever we can to protect ourselves, grasping the first defense mechanism we can reach.

Would we still behave this way if failure weren't considered so bad?

It's all too easy to think of success as a zero-sum game, as if success happens instead of failure, rather than as a result of many failed attempts. But as any artist or scientist or athlete can attest, every major masterpiece, breakthrough, or triumph is built on a pile of failed efforts they made to get there.

Failure is not intrinsically negative, but we have coded it that way. Sure, failing on some levels is harder to handle than others, but even the worst-case scenarios can take on a more generative meaning with the right framework.

Of the thousands of videos I've seen on TikTok, there is one that has actually reshaped the way my husband and I manage the inevitable friction that builds up between anyone sharing a home together: Allow me to introduce you to the house gnome.

The house gnome is an invisible, mischievous creature who's always up to minor hijinks and creating little inconveniences at our home. The house gnome might leave the milk out on the counter all day, for example, or set a pair of muddy boots in the middle of the entryway. I would never do that, and neither would my husband, so it must have been the gnome. He also turns the back porch light back on after I distinctly remember turning it off, and sometimes he takes my husband's empty seltzer cans and leaves them on my clean dresser. He's always trying to get us in trouble with each other, but we're on to him!

The house gnome has saved us an untold amount of unnecessary grief over things that are ultimately just not that important. But when you're stressed and tired, sometimes the most innocuous "friendly reminder" can send you straight to the armory, ready to launch every defensive tactic you've got. "Hey honey, I thought you said you'd turn out the porch light?" might as well be an invitation to a duel.

But the house gnome takes the brunt of it instead. Because we know we're all trying our best here, and it's hard to be perfect all the time, and even harder to laugh it off when you're depleted and exhausted already. Especially when you have a house gnome coming along and causing trouble.

In other words: Find whatever silly ways you can to take yourself less seriously. It's much easier to remember what's more important than defensiveness.

Just because it's hard to hear in the moment doesn't mean at times feedback isn't useful, important, or relevant. Just because I'm uncomfortable doesn't mean I don't need to know what they're telling me.

The other thing I've learned. I can take it.

I might feel those urges rise up — a desire to defend myself, or to explain what I really meant, or argue the point until I can change their mind — but giving in to those urges not only prevents me from learning something that might help me grow, they also usually become unbearable sources of embarrassment in the aftermath. I can be held accountable for my actions, behaviors, art, and words. I can handle being uncomfortable. I can survive listening to something that's hard to hear. We all can. Because we are more than any one thing we said or did. We're still learning, still growing, still getting to be better bit by bit, with experience, time, and new information.

A word from the PBIS Team...

Positive Intent

When you have a child with oppositional, aggressive, or otherwise challenging behaviors in your classroom, it's easy and normal to get frustrated, irritated, or just plain fed up. Conscious Discipline gives us strategies, examples & insight on how we can recognize these feelings in ourselves and then choose to consciously respond rather than just react when the littles we work with challenge us. One of these skills is through assuming or reframing thoughts and ideas to have positive intent. This doesn't mean just telling ourselves that everything is peachy and

When we attribute **Positive Intent** to a child's behavior, we are able to stay calm and help calm our children.

perfect. It does ask us to take a step back, look for the “why” and plan a response, rather than just assuming children are acting up just to push our buttons. What might shift if instead of looking at a child's behavior as being disrespectful, mean, or attention seeking, to seeing these behaviors as a call for help. Let's take a couple of behavior descriptions from BIRs that we've received from classrooms in this past month. As you read through these- which of the thought bubbles do you find yourself more closely relating to? No judgement, we've all been there. But see if reframing with positive intent changes how you feel about a child's behavior.

“Kicked and pushed peer causing injury to peer”

This kid is a bully and picks on the smaller kids every day. He's just mean to them.

He's a super energetic kid that needs lots of room to move his body. This cold weather has really been tough when we can't go outside and let them run. I wonder how we could add in more gross motor activities indoors.

While playing in the block area with his teacher, he destroyed the block building we were building together. When teacher tried to talk to him, he laughed and started throwing toys.

What a little jerk. Here I am trying to play with him, and he just laughs at me and throws toys at me. I don't get paid enough to put up with this.

What was he trying to tell me with knocking down our tower? Was he getting bored with the blocks? Did another child trigger him or upset him? He does throw toys often, I wonder if we could get some balls or beanbags out to have him toss or make a target to throw things at the wall.

Child refused to leave the gym when it was time to come back in the classroom. Sat with his arms crossed. When we got back to the classroom for small group, he tried to leave the classroom.

He is so defiant. Always pouting and never listens when it's time to line up, just stalling and makes everyone have to wait on him.

He really loves playing in the gym. This transition is really hard for him. He's a leader and it's really hard for him when he feels like he doesn't get any control. I'm going to let him announce when it's time to clean up next time, and plan a small group with some of his favorite things.

A peer had a book that she wanted and walked away with it. The peer went to lay on the couch. She followed and scratched the peer on the face.

She knows better and knows that she needs to share. She just went over to scratch him just to be mean.

She's an only child and doesn't have to share at home. Coming to Early Head Start has been a hard adjustment to her. Maybe we can look at other ways to practice sharing at other times so it will come easier for her next time.

The PBIS Team

Wellness Committee News!

From the Wellness Committee:

HOW TO GET BETTER FASTER WHEN YOU GET SICK?

- Prioritize Rest: The immune system works better when you are sleeping.
- Stay Hydrated: Drink water, herbal tea, broth, and electrolytes.
- Eat for Recovery: Soups, fruits-citrus & berries, vegetables, & Yogurt.
- Take vitamins such as zinc, vitamin C, & vitamin D.
- Avoid Reinfection: Wash hands often, change bedding and pillowcases daily, & disinfect high touch surfaces such as door handles, doorknobs, & light switches.



Also, just a reminder, throughout the week of February, the Wellness committee is doing candy-grams. The flyer is below, please fill out and return to a Coordinator with your payment and the wellness team will get them sent out!

WELLNESS COMMITTEE PRESENTS:

Candy Grams!

SEND A CANDY-GRAM TO YOUR FAVORITE COWORKERS THROUGHOUT THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY

FILL OUT THE FORM BELOW AND GIVE YOUR ORDER TO AN ESC TO SUBMIT



Choose one:

- Message gram (just a simple heart-shaped note) \$.50
- Mini-gram (note with a small candy) \$1.00
- Grande-gram (note with a full size candy bar) \$2.00

Your name: _____

Recipient's name: _____

Message: _____

ESC taking order (circle one): Kris Heather Tracy Other: _____

New Employee Spotlight



Faith Ericksen joined the Head Start team this month as the new Harlan Assistant Teacher Floater. "I am 26 years old. I am married, I have a 5 year old son, Kayden, and a 3 year old daughter, Magnolia. I graduated from Harlan High School. My favorite hobby is to paint." Welcome to the Head Start team Faith!

Staff Shout-out's

Please help us recognize and shout-out your co-workers and submit any shout-outs to dsegebart@westcca.org.



Shout out to **Katie Cannon and Samantha Villalovos**! They have already built a great classroom team! They just step in where needed and everything runs like a well-oiled machine!

Huge shoutout to **Annette Helle** and **Shay McCollum** for being flexible and subbing in multiple classrooms these past couple months. Your support for the program does not go unsee. We appreciate you both so much!

Katie Cannon - Whenever I walk through the halls, I love hearing Katie sing and play with the children. It never fails to make me smile. The children's laughs and engagement show how passionate she is in her career. Thank you for showing up and giving your best every single day, Katie!

Andrea Weston and **Emily Ray** for being amazing co teachers and for supporting the kiddos and myself 😊

Shout-out to our incredible staff navigating some really challenging behaviors right now in **Council Bluffs HS and Red Oak HS**. Your patience, consistency, and compassion do not go unnoticed. The work you're doing is hard, meaningful, and deeply appreciated. Keep up the great work 🙌

Shout out to **Paula Nagel, Laura Bowen** and **Jennifer Orr** for completing OAE hearing screening training to help screen children that have not received these screens at our Community Partnerships!

Shout out to **Barbara Barrale** for being an amazing food staff. The kids love her stories and seeing her during meal times.

I really appreciate **Shawntel Baragar** and **Michaela Baratta's** contributions for TLC's! They are always willing to talk and ask questions!

I heard a lot of teaching and learning conversations at **Shalee McCollum and Danielle Jessens's** breakfast table today and **Annette Helle** noticed when children were getting done with their meal and went over and did a movement activity with those that were done!

Shout out to **Laura Bowen** for recruiting more children and for subbing in the classroom when I was sick.



Shout out to **Heather Dulberg**. Heather has stepped up Red Oak as the teacher to support children and families and ensure services continue. During an observation this month Heather had a great positive to negative ratio going! She was really praising those children for following behavior expectations. She was also doing a great job with her self-talk and individualizing her small group to meet the needs of the children in her classroom! She asked a lot of open-ended questions to get the children talking! Her expectations and follow through today was some of the best I've seen in all the years I've had the opportunity to work with her!



Staff Accomplishments

Annette Helle (Atlantic Assistant Teacher) has completed her Preschool CDA. Congratulations Annette, way to go!

Work Anniversaries

Laura Bowen, Family Advocate, **15 years**

Rose Uhrich, Madison EHS Teacher, **2 years**

Emily Korbel, Council Bluffs Assistant Teacher, **1 year**

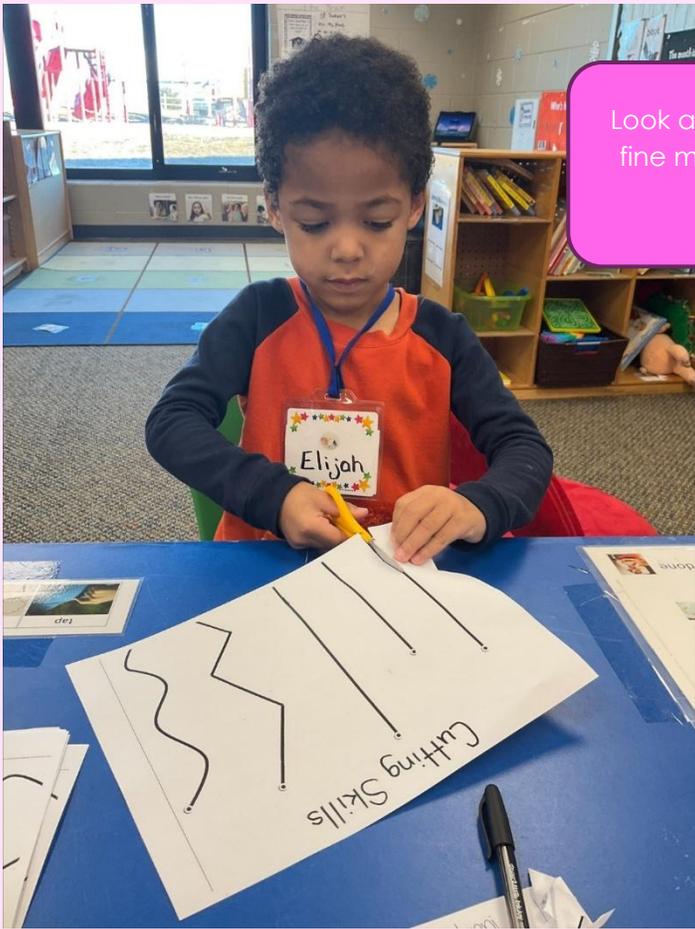
Nicole Martz, Harlan Food Service, **1 year**

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

Head Start Happenings.....



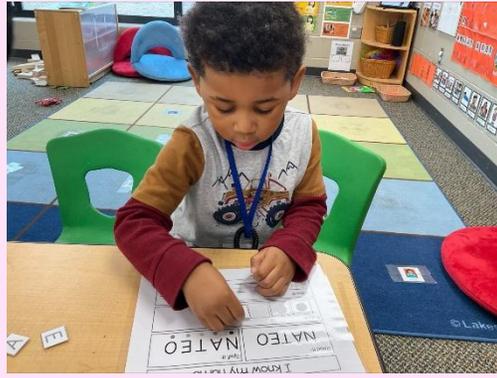
We made Ms. Jen Alexander's Instagram page!
What was your favorite part of training?



Look at those growing fine motor and math skills!



Feeling ill? No worries! Mills County HS has a Head Start hospital! Look at those future doctors! ☺



Mills County Head Start got to enjoy some cloud dough in the water table this month!



Events/ Dates to Remember

- February 4th, 2026- Early Dismissal
- February 11th, 2026- Early Dismissal
- February 16th, 2026- No School- Holiday
- February 18th, 2026- Early Dismissal
- February 25th, 2026- Early Dismissal

Staff Birthdays...

- February 9th- Rose Uhrich
- February 10th- Katelyn Minor, Harlan EHS 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:

- EHS Home Based Visitor
- EHS Floater Teacher Harlan
- EHS Teacher Harlan
- Red Oak Head Start Lead Teacher
- Harlan Head Start Assistant Teacher
- Council Bluffs Assistant Teacher
- Denison Bilingual Family Advocate
- ESC Mills County and Red Oak

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