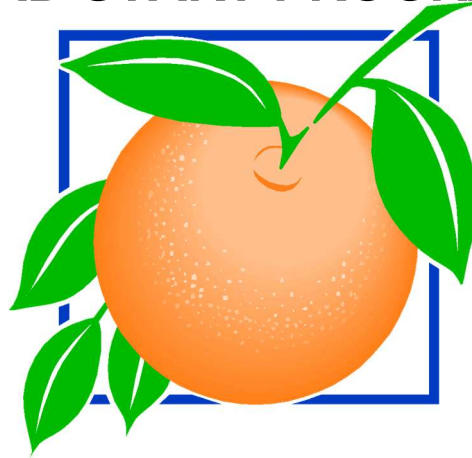


**ORANGE COUNTY
HEAD START PROGRAM**



***APPLICATION FOR
FEDERAL ASSISTANCE
FIVE YEAR GRANT (YEAR 1)
FY 2025-2026***



Non-Competitive Baseline Application Grant No. 04CH011834, between the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start and Orange County in the amount of \$16,325,053 for the continued operation of the Head Start Program with the required non-federal match in the amount of \$4,081,263.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

Sonya L. Hill, Head Start Manager
Community and Family Services Department
Head Start Division
2100 E. Michigan Street
Orlando, FL 32806
Phone: (407) 836-6590 Fax: (407) 836-1921

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Section I: Program Design and Approach to Service Delivery

Sub-Section A: Goals

1.a.b. Program Goals, Measurable Objectives, and Expected Outcomes

Program Goals	Measurable Objectives Description
Goal 1: Strengthen Staff Development and Program Quality	1. Ensure 90% of staff complete annual professional development training
Goal 2: Improve Staff Retention	1. Increase staff retention and satisfaction by 20% over five years
Goal 3: Enhance Staff Mental Health and Well-Being	1. Ensure 75% of staff report improved well-being in annual surveys 2. Ensure at least 60% of staff attend wellness-related training or activity annually
Goal 4: Integration of User-Friendly Digital Tools	1. Increase staff confidence and proficiency in using digital tools by 30% 2. Improve family engagement rates by 20%
Goal 5: Strengthen Family Engagement and Support	1. Achieving 75% parent participation in family workshops annually 2. Connect at least 60% of families to social services, job training, or educational opportunities annually

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1.c. Example: Goal 3 - Measurable Objective 3.1

Goal: Enhance Staff Mental Health and Well-Being

Objective: Ensure 75% of staff reports improved well-being in annual surveys

Expected Outcome:

Reduced stress and burnout among staff, leading to higher job satisfaction and morale.

Expected Challenges:

1. Low survey participation
2. Limited staff engagement in wellness initiatives
3. Adequate staffing prevents attendance at County wellness activities/programs
4. Inability to measure “well-being” objectively
5. Resistance to mental health discussions

Action Steps	Data, Tools, or Methods for Tracking Progress
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Conduct regular wellness assessments to identify staff mental health needs and provide targeted support.2. Offer wellness workshops and mindfulness training to help staff develop stress management strategies.	<p><u>Tracking Progress:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff wellness surveys results• Number of staff participating in wellness programs and activities• Staff attendance• Staff participation in feedback sessions <p><u>Tools & Methods:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HR Information System to track participation in wellness programs

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3. Provide classroom coverage to allow teaching staff to attend workshops or trainings offered.
4. Promote available mental health resources available through Orange County's Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
5. Conduct quarterly check-ins with staff through surveys or focus groups to monitor well-being and gather feedback for continuous improvement.
6. Encourage leadership participation in staff well-being initiatives to promote a culture of mental health awareness.

- SurveyMonkey to collect and analyze staff well-being survey data
- Performance Dashboards

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Example: Goal 5 - Measurable Objective 5.2

Goal: Strengthen Family Engagement and Support

Objective: Connect at least 60% of families to social services, job training, or educational opportunities annually

Expected Outcome: Increased family self-sufficiency and economic stability.

Expected Challenges:

- Limited awareness or trust in available services among families
- Barriers to participation, such as transportation or scheduling conflicts
- Difficulty in obtaining follow-up data on whether services were utilized

Action Steps	Data, Tools, or Methods for Tracking Progress
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Connect families with community resources (e.g., GED programs, job training, housing assistance).2. Provide workshops on financial literacy and employment skills.3. Establish referral systems with workforce development agencies.	<p><u>Tracking Progress:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of families referred to community resources• Percentage of families accessing at least one social service annually• Surveys measuring family satisfaction with support services• Attendance records for job training and educational workshops <p><u>Tools & Methods:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ChildPlus - Family engagement tracking system• Referral logs and follow-up records• Survey families to assess impact• Collaboration reports from community partners

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1.b School Readiness Goals

Program Goals	Measurable Objectives Description
Goal1-Approaches to Learning: Children will show interest in and curiosity about the world around them, using imagination in play and interactions with others.	1. Objective: By the end of the program year, 85% of children will demonstrate initiative, curiosity, and persistence as measured by Galileo indicators of creative and flexible thinking.
Goal 2-Mathematics Development: Children will recognize numbers, understand basic operations (addition and subtraction), and explore measurement, patterns, and comparisons.	2. Objective: By the end of the program year, 85% of children will demonstrate development in counting, comparing, and solving simple math problems through intentional play-based learning.
Goal 3- Language & Literacy: Children will develop early literacy skills including phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print concepts.	3. Objective: By the end of the program year, 85% of children will demonstrate progress in identifying letter names and sounds, recognizing print, and engaging in early writing.

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Goal 4-Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development: Children will demonstrate increasing control, strength, and coordination of small and large muscles and practice safe behaviors.	4. Objective: By the end of the program year, 85% of children will demonstrate age-appropriate fine and gross motor skills and follow health and safety routines.
Goal 5- Social and Emotional Development: Children will develop self-regulation, engage in positive relationships, and resolve conflicts constructively.	5. Objective: By the end of the program year, 85% of children will demonstrate skills in emotional regulation, peer interaction, and conflict resolution.

1.c. Example: Goal 2 Mathematics Development - Measurable Objective 1

Goal: Children will recognize numbers, understand basic operations (addition and subtraction), and explore measurement, patterns, and comparisons.

Objective: 2.By the end of the program year, 85% of children will demonstrate development in counting, comparing, and solving simple math problems through intentional play-based learning.

Expected Outcome:

- 85% of children will demonstrate age-appropriate proficiency in counting, comparing, and early operations.

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Expected Challenges:

1. Some educators may need additional support in integrating math across the curriculum. Children entering the program with limited prior exposure to math vocabulary and concepts.

Action Steps	Data, Tools, or Methods for Tracking Progress
1. Teachers will embed math concepts into daily HighScope routines (e.g., large group, work time). Math materials (e.g., manipulatives, measurement tools) will be included in all interest areas. Targeted small group math experiences will be provided weekly.	<p><u>Tracking Progress:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Galileo performance reports, Ongoing anecdotal records, Classroom observations• <p><u>Tools & Methods:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Galileo Mathematics Development domain scores.

1.c. Example: Goal 3 Language & Literacy - Measurable Objective 1

Goal: Children will develop early literacy skills including phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print concepts.

Objective: By the end of the program year, 85% of children will demonstrate progress in identifying letter names and sounds, recognizing print, and engaging in early writing.

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Expected Outcome:

- 85% of children will meet or exceed literacy benchmarks aligned to Galileo assessment

Expected Challenges:

2. Children with limited English exposure may progress more slowly in phonological awareness. Need for consistent home support in reading and writing routines.

Action Steps	Data, Tools, or Methods for Tracking Progress
2. High Scope small group times will include literacy activities and writing practice. Storybook reading will be interactive and include vocabulary-building strategies. Teachers will model and encourage writing during daily classroom routines.	<p><u>Tracking Progress:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Galileo checkpoints, language-rich lesson plans, writing samples and observational notes. <p><u>Tools & Methods:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Galileo Language & Literacy development benchmarks.

Subsection A.2 & A.3: Alignment of School Readiness Goals with ELOF and LEA Requirements

Orange County Head Start's (OCHS) school readiness goals are strategically aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF). They are also

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informed by the developmental expectations of Orange County Public Schools (OCPS), where most of the children transition after completing our program.

These goals span all five ELOF domains: Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Language and Literacy; Cognition (including Mathematics); and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development. Together, they reflect a comprehensive understanding of the skills and behaviors needed for school success.

Our program utilizes the HighScope Curriculum, which provides a developmentally appropriate, research-based approach to supporting children's learning through active engagement and intentional instruction. To ensure coverage of all domains, HighScope is supplemented with targeted curricula. These include *I Am Moving, I Am Learning* (to promote physical activity and healthy habits), *DLM Express* (to reinforce early literacy and language development), and *Nemours BrightStart* (to support children at risk for reading difficulties). These combined resources ensure our teaching practices align with ELOF goals and build foundational skills that prepare children for the academic and social demands of kindergarten.

Children's progress is monitored using the Galileo assessment system, which is aligned with ELOF indicators. Data is reviewed during three checkpoints each program year—fall, winter, and spring. These reviews guide instructional planning, identify learning trends, and shape responsive teaching strategies.

To align with OCPS kindergarten readiness standards, representatives from the district serve on the School Readiness Committee. This committee ensures that the program reflects district priorities in language, literacy, math, and self-regulation and instructional focus. For example, print-rich environments, daily writing experiences, and

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math integrated instruction across routines directly supports the academic expectations established by OCPS.

The School Readiness Committee is a cross-sector working group composed of:

- Parents (including Policy Council members)
- Orange County Public Schools representatives
- Head Start teachers and education staff
- Mental health and disabilities team members
- County commission designees
- Early Learning Coalition staff
- Community partners and contracted vendors

The committee reviews child outcome data, lesson plans, observation notes, and findings from the Community Assessment to develop and refine school readiness goals. These goals are data-driven, uniform, and responsive to the developmental needs of children enrolled in the program.

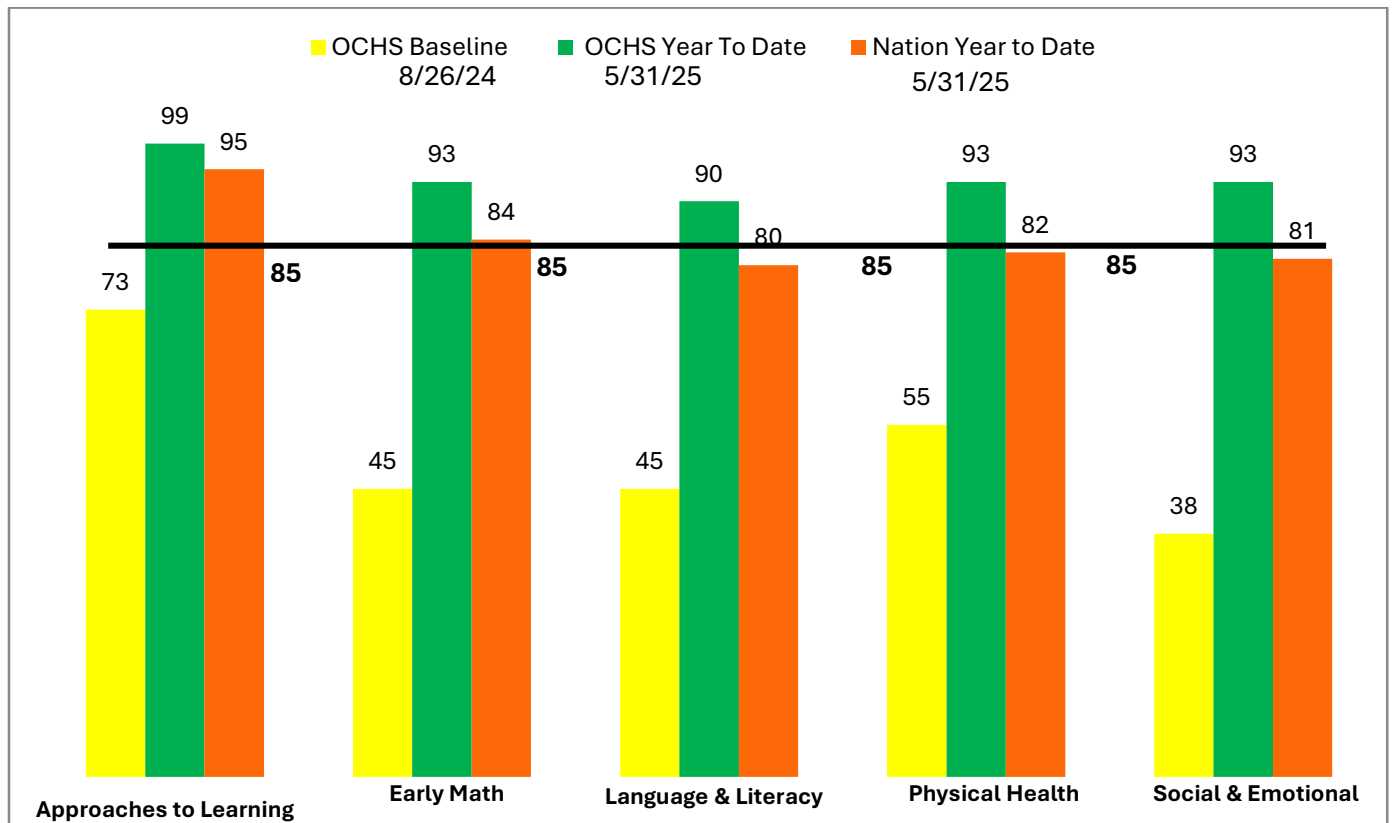
Once the committee completes its review, the finalized school readiness goals and supporting data are presented to both the Policy Council and the Governing Board. Although no formal vote is required, both governing bodies provide input to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with the priorities of the children and families served.

Through this collaborative and evidence-based approach, OCHS ensures that its school readiness goals are anchored in the ELOF and reflect a continuum of learning from birth to kindergarten entry. These goals are aligned with OCPS's expectations for

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kindergarten success and are developed through shared governance with involvement from families, educators, and community stakeholders.

This process guarantees that every child enrolled in OCHS is equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed in school and beyond. The chart below represents school readiness data collected on all children transitioning to kindergarten during the current program year across the five essential domains. It shows the percentage of the 806 children who exceeded the developmental benchmark expectation of 85% achievement for their age in each school readiness goal. These outcomes are compared to national benchmarks using the Galileo Assessment tool. The graph demonstrates that progress was made from each child's initial assessment, and all children surpassed predicted developmental learning levels by the end of the school year.



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Sub-Section B: Service Delivery

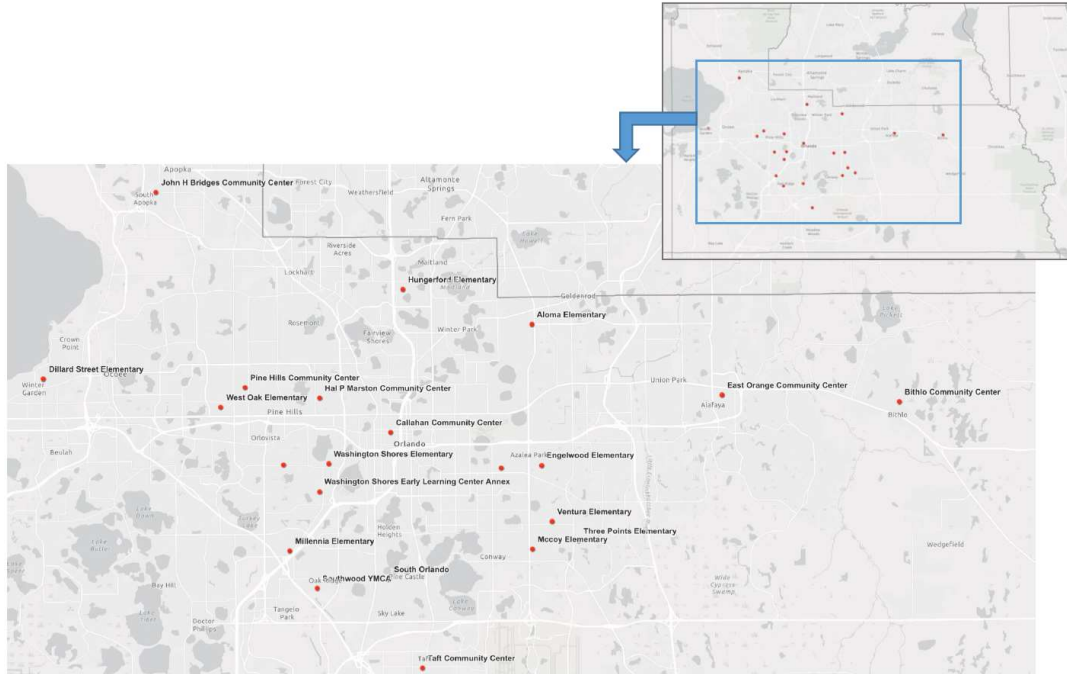
1.a.b.c. Service and Recruitment Area

OCHS ensures uniform access and effective delivery of services to meet the needs of enrolled children and families. The program model is built on research-based best practices, ensuring alignment with the Head Start Act, Head Start Performance Standards, and the findings from the 2025 Head Start Community Assessment.

OCHS serves children and families throughout Orange County, Florida, focusing its recruitment and enrollment efforts on areas identified as high-need zones through community assessments and provides strong evidence for the need for childhood programs. Unless a family becomes homeless, the family must reside, work or be eligible to attend in this county. Enrollment prioritization is based on federal eligibility guidelines, ensuring low-income families, children with disabilities, and those experiencing homelessness receive priority placement.

Recruitment strategies include community outreach events and partnerships with local organizations, digital advertising and direct engagement via social media and local broadcasts, collaboration with Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) to identify eligible children, family referrals and word-of-mouth campaigns, leveraging current Head Start families, and bilingual recruitment materials in English and Spanish to address language barriers.

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Through data-driven recruitment, OCHS ensures that families with the greatest need have access to high-quality early childhood education, health services, and family support programs. Orange County, Florida, continues to experience a critical and growing need for Head Start Program services. Based on findings from the 2025 Community Assessment, the following challenges illustrate the urgent demand for continued and expanded early childhood education and family support services:

1. Economic Disadvantage and Child Poverty

A significant portion of families with children ages 0–5 in Orange County live below the federal poverty line. These families, particularly within Black and Hispanic communities, face barriers to meeting basic needs, including food, rent, child care, and health care. Many qualify as ALICE households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), further underscoring economic vulnerability.

2. Housing Instability and Homelessness

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The County faces a severe shortage of affordable housing. Families served by Head Start often experience housing insecurity, and local data shows a persistent rise in homelessness among families with young children. Stable housing is a critical foundation for early learning and development.

3. Food Insecurity and Limited Access to Nutrition

Many families remain food insecure despite participation in SNAP and food pantry programs. With multiple food deserts in the county, access to nutritious meals is inconsistent, placing young children at risk of developmental delays and health complications.

4. Inadequate Access to Health, Dental, and Mental Health Services

Families frequently lack access to essential services, including medical and dental care, prescription medications, mental health resources, and early intervention support for children with disabilities. These unmet needs hinder school readiness and overall family well-being.

5. Rising Population and Geographic Service Gaps

Orange County's population has grown by over 31% since 2010, now exceeding 1.5 million residents. This surge has created increased demand for early education services, particularly in underserved communities where access to quality child development programs remains limited.

6. Educational Gaps and School Readiness Concerns

Children in the Head Start target population often enter kindergarten lacking foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional development. COVID-19

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further exacerbated these gaps, increasing the need for early intervention and school readiness programming.

7. Strained Early Childhood Education Workforce

Low wages and high turnover in the early childhood sector contribute to program instability and classroom closures. Despite OCHS's strong workforce retention initiatives, demand continues to exceed available staffing and classroom capacity.

8. Demonstrated Impact and Community Support

In the 2023–2024 school year, OCHS exceeded its funded enrollment of 1,536 by serving over 1,700 children. The program also successfully supported 45 formerly homeless families in securing stable housing and facilitated over 400 parent completions of financial literacy training. Strong outcomes and active community partnerships highlight the program's effectiveness and importance.

These findings underscore the essential role Head Start plays in Orange County. The program is uniquely positioned to provide comprehensive early learning, health, nutrition, and family engagement services to the county's most vulnerable children. Continued investment is necessary to meet growing demand and ensure all children enter school ready to succeed.

2.a.b. Needs of Children and Families

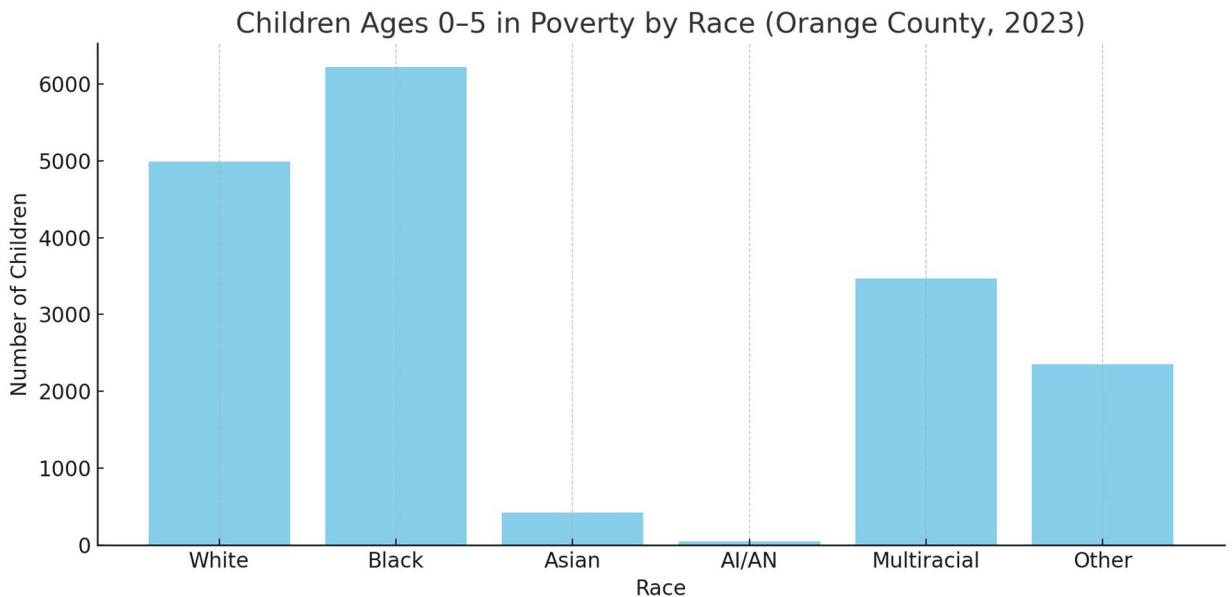
Orange County, Florida, is home to an estimated 17,509 children under the age of five living in poverty. This vulnerable population spans diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and includes children experiencing homelessness, disabilities, and foster care. Head Start and Early Head Start services remain vital to meeting these families' comprehensive needs.

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Ethnicity Breakdown:

- Hispanic/Latino: 8,060 children (46%)
- Non-Hispanic/Latino: 9,449 children

Race Breakdown:



Language Spoken in Households in Poverty

- Spanish is the primary language for **30.9%** of the population in poverty in Orange County.
- This significantly exceeds the national average (18.7%) and highlights the need for bilingual service provision.

Geographic Concentration of Need

Children living in poverty are concentrated in high-need Census Tracts:

- **Census Tract 167.39 (Azalea Park)** – 880 children
- **Tract 146.01 (Orlando)** – 785 children

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- Other areas with significant concentrations include tracts 171.10, 146.06, 151.04, and 123.04.

These areas align with current and potential expansion zones for Head Start service delivery.

Special Populations

Children Experiencing Homelessness (2022–2023):

- 146 children ages 3–5 identified under the McKinney-Vento Act.

Children in Foster Care (2022):

- 739 children under age 5
 - 138 were infants under age 1
 - 319 were ages 1–4

Children with Disabilities (IDEA Eligible):

- 535,392 children ages 3–5 were identified with qualifying disabilities:
 - 241,000: Developmental delay
 - 81,000: Autism
 - 175,000: Speech/language impairment

These figures highlight the ongoing need for equitable, disability-accommodating early education services.

Orange County's early childhood population reflects both growing numbers and increasing complexity of need. Racially and linguistically diverse, with a significant share of children affected by poverty, housing insecurity, and developmental delays, the region requires sustained and expanded Head Start. This data-driven profile underscores the urgency of investing in comprehensive early education programs that

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are accessible and tailored to meet the needs of Orange County's most vulnerable children.

The 2025 Community Assessment for Orange County reveals significant and interrelated service needs among low-income families with children under five and pregnant women. Many children enter kindergarten without foundational skills in early literacy, numeracy, and self-regulation, often as a result of limited access to high-quality early learning opportunities and interventions. These gaps have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted developmental milestones, especially in language and social-emotional areas. Parents have expressed the need for increased access to adult education, English language instruction, and digital literacy to better support their children's education.

Health care access remains a critical concern. Many families lack consistent access to pediatric and maternal health care providers, dental services, immunizations, and vision screenings. Mental health needs are especially pronounced, with both children and parents affected by trauma, behavioral challenges, and limited availability of culturally competent care. Pregnant women face additional risks due to delayed prenatal care and limited access to nutrition and mental health support. These barriers contribute to disparities in birth outcomes and early child development.

Nutrition insecurity also affects many families, with numerous households relying on SNAP, WIC, and food pantries, yet still reporting hunger and inconsistent access to healthy food. Several parts of Orange County are designated food deserts, limiting families' ability to purchase nutritious groceries locally. As a result, nutritional education, food access, and outreach services remain vital. Additionally, social services include

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support for financial literacy, housing stability, and case management, particularly among families facing homelessness, immigration challenges, or language barriers.

Child care access is another persistent need. Despite a relatively high number of licensed providers, cost, location, and staffing shortages make affordable, high-quality care inaccessible to many families. This is especially challenging for parents working non-traditional hours or juggling multiple jobs. They require flexible, full-day, year-round child care solutions aligned with their employment or training schedules. Collectively, these findings underscore the essential role of Head Start in addressing the complex, layered needs of Orange County's most vulnerable children and families.

Based on the 2025 Community Assessment for OCHS, there is a robust array of early childhood development programs and services aimed at serving eligible children, yet capacity and affordability remain ongoing challenges. Orange County has 624 licensed child care programs with the capacity to serve 60,665 children from birth to school-age. These include 489 child care centers, 125 family day care homes, and 9 large family child care homes. Of the total providers, 306 have an active School Readiness status and serve approximately 31,232 children.

The Early Learning Coalition of Orange County plays a key role in administering the School Readiness Program, which offers financial assistance to low-income families. Enrollment in this program saw a decline from 16,105 children in FY 2022-23 to 9,276 in FY 2023-24, indicating either reduced demand or constraints in funding or capacity. These programs include developmental screenings and linkages to health and educational services, working closely with other initiatives like Head Start and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK).

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The VPK program itself is another significant contributor, serving 72.3% of 4-year-old children in Orange County (12,221 out of 16,907 eligible children) during the 2024-25 program year. At the state level, Florida ranks second in the U.S. for access and enrollment of 4-year-olds in state-funded pre-K, though no state services are provided for 3-year-olds. Additionally, 31,437 children statewide were enrolled in federally funded Head Start programs.

Despite these resources, affordability and accessibility remain pressing concerns. The cost of infant care in a preschool-based program in Florida averages \$12,639 annually exceeding the cost of in-state public college tuition and consuming 34.8% of a single parent's income. Moreover, only 18% of subsidy-eligible children in Florida receive benefits under the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) due to insufficient funding.

These findings underscore the importance of continued support and expansion of Head Start and other early childhood services in Orange County to meet the high demand for affordable, quality child care and early learning opportunities for vulnerable families.

3.a. Program Option(s) and Funded Enrollment Slots

OCHS operates a preschool-based program model designed to meet the developmental, educational, and support needs of eligible children and their families. OCHS will comply with 1302 Subpart B by ensuring that the program's structure aligns with community assessments and provides comprehensive services as required by Head Start Program Performance Standards. The program is aligned with Head Start

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Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), specifically 45 CFR §1302.20 and §1302.21, and is structured to promote school readiness, access, and continuity of care.

3.c. Program Structure

OCHS is federally funded to serve 1,536 children annually, ages 3 to 5, across 23 strategically located preschools in Orange County, Florida, providing high-quality early education and comprehensive services throughout Orange County, Florida. Enrollment slots are distributed across our preschools based on community needs and are structured to meet the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). The program provides full-day, full-school-year services that exceed the federally required 1,020 instructional hours, offering 180 instructional days at six hours per day, totaling 1,080 hours annually per child.

Program Model	Age Group Served	Funded Enrollment
Full-Day, Preschool-Based	Children ages 3–5	1,536 federally funded slots
Extended Day Services	Eligible working families	Based on demonstrated need
Dual Enrollment with OCPs	Children with IEPs	Varies by school preschool
Partnership Classrooms	Community agency collaborations	Flexible capacity

OCHS prioritizes extended-day services for children from families engaged in work, training, or education programs ensuring accessibility for children with disabilities and those from families in workforce training or education programs. Children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) may also qualify for up to four additional instructional hours daily, consistent with 45 CFR §1302.60(a) and §1302.61(b). Though funded for 1,536 children, OCHS often serves more due to natural attrition and prompt

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re-enrollment into vacated slots. Enrollment is monitored continuously to ensure compliance with federal requirements while supporting eligible children across the service area, and children vacating slots are promptly replaced per 45 CFR §1302.15(b) to maintain full enrollment and maximize reach.

The program calendar is aligned with Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) to facilitate smooth transitions into kindergarten and to promote continuity across educational settings offering 180 instructional days per year. Each classroom provides six hours of instruction daily, totaling 1,080 hours annually—exceeding the federal requirement of 1,020 hours for full school-year programs, as stated in 45 CFR §1302.21(c)(2)(iii). This structure supports school readiness, continuity of care, and social-emotional development. Classroom structures, staffing, and curricula are tailored to meet the needs of children with disabilities, dual language learners, and those requiring specialized supports.

OCHS designs its enrollment model to reflect local community needs, following the priorities outlined in the Community Assessment. Children are assigned to preschools based on proximity, need, and availability, ensuring geographic equity and efficient use of funded capacity.

4.a.b.c. Preschool Locations and Facilities

OCHS currently operates twenty-three (23) Head Start preschool locations throughout Orange County, Florida. Of these, nine (9) are situated in county-owned facilities strategically located in neighborhoods identified in the Community Assessment as at-risk, low-income, and home to intergenerational family structures. These preschools provide critical access to early childhood services in areas of concentrated

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need, ensuring compliance with the federal mandate to serve the most vulnerable populations.

In addition, thirteen (13) of our program preschools are located on the campuses of Orange County Public Schools (OCPS), specifically within Title I elementary schools. These schools are situated in neighborhoods where the student population directly reflects the demographic and socio-economic profiles outlined in the Community Assessment. Co-locating Head Start classrooms on these campuses allows for strong collaboration with OCPS and ensures a seamless educational continuum for children and families.

OCHS also operates one leased facility, the Callahan Head Start Preschool, located in downtown Orlando. This location has a longstanding and successful partnership with the City of Orlando, serving as a critical hub for early childhood education for decades. The Callahan Head Start Preschool has served children and families in the Parramore community for over 30 years, making it one of the oldest continuously operating Head Start preschools in the county. Through its strong collaboration with the City of Orlando, Callahan has played a vital role in delivering high-quality early learning experiences and wraparound support services in one of the city's most historically underserved neighborhoods. These facilities are strategically placed in underserved communities, ensuring direct access to early childhood services.

Facility Type	Number of Preschoolss	Key Features
County-Owned Facilities	9	Located in at-risk, low-income neighborhoods.
OCPS School-Based Preschoolss	13	Integrated within public school campuses.

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Leased Facility (Callahan Head Start Preschool)	1	Long-standing partnership with the City of Orlando.
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OCHS ensures continuous maintenance and facility improvements, including playground enhancements and classroom renovations to meet Head Start Performance Standards.

Preschool Operations and Schedule Modifications

OCHS continues to align closely with the local education agency by adopting its school calendar and other operational practices to ensure consistency and coordination across systems. In alignment with this approach, the program will implement a scheduled closure for one week during the winter holiday break, which will apply to all Head Start preschools as well as the administrative office. Additionally, the program will continue offering full-day, full-year services, operating from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., including during the month of June. During June, while the preschools remain open, the program will implement a 32-hour workweek by closing on Fridays, providing staff with a modified schedule to support mental wellness and work-life balance. Staff will be able to utilize accrued leave and other benefits during the scheduled closures. These intentional adjustments reflect the program's ongoing commitment to staff well-being, operational efficiency, and alignment with community standards.

Changes to Service Locations

For the upcoming program year, OCHS proposes closing the Millennia Head Start preschool, located on the campus of Millennia Elementary School. The closure is necessary due to space constraints, as the elementary school is expanding services to accommodate a new Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program. While OCHS values

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the collaboration with Millennia Elementary, the relocation is unavoidable due to the district's prioritization of specialized education services.

The program has actively sought space in the 32808 and 32818 ZIP code, commonly known as Pine Hills, which is a high-need area experiencing population growth and increased rates of families living below the federal poverty guideline. According to recent data, approximately 24.3% of families in the 32808 area live below the poverty line, making it a top priority for expansion. We are pleased to report that approval has been granted to open a new Head Start preschool on the campus of Rosemont Elementary School, located adjacent to a community preschool that provides integrated wraparound services for children and families in a one-stop-shop model. This addition will enhance family support and improve educational outcomes by linking families to multiple resources in one location.

Additionally, the program has submitted an inquiry to Orla Vista Elementary School, with the goal of establishing a preschool on campus for the 2025–2026 program year. Orla Vista serves families in an area where over 21% of residents live in poverty, making it another high-priority zone. If space is secured, OCHS plans to close the Washington Shores Head Start preschool, which is currently located on the Washington Shores Elementary School campus. This decision is supported by data showing close proximity to two other OCHS preschools, Lila Mitchell Head Start and Washington Shores Primary Early Learning Head Start, which are located within a 1.3-mile radius. Enrollment challenges and staffing efficiencies further support the consolidation plan, as the assigned family service worker has experienced ongoing difficulties in maintaining full enrollment at the Washington Shores preschool.

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Facility Expansion and Modifications

To address shifting enrollment patterns, the program is exploring capacity increases at other preschools, including Hal Marston Head Start, John Bridges Head Start, East Orange Head Start, and Washington Shores Primary Early Learning Head Start. These potential expansions will prioritize placement for three-year-old children, helping to ensure access and developmental readiness services across the program.

The program has no plans to construct new facilities or engage in major renovations, purchases, or agreements during this grant cycle. However, Orange County will conduct architectural assessments at several locations Pine Hills, Lila Mitchell, John Bridges, and South Orlando YMCA Head Start to support the installation of shade structures over playgrounds. The absence of shaded areas presents a health and safety risk for young children, particularly given Florida's extreme heat and prolonged sun exposure. OCHS plans to seek supplemental funding through the Office of Head Start to address these safety concerns and ensure that outdoor play environments meet federal and local safety standards.

5.a.b. Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA)

OCHS implements a robust Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) system in compliance with Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR §1302 Subpart A). The system is designed to identify and prioritize children and families most in need of early childhood education services.

Eligibility and Selection Criteria

Eligibility is determined according to federal guidelines, prioritizing families at or below the federal poverty level, children experiencing homelessness or in foster/kinship

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care, families receiving public assistance (e.g., SNAP, SSI, TANF), and children with diagnosed or suspected disabilities.

OCHS uses a point-based selection system, reviewed annually by the ERSEA Criteria Advisory Committee, composed of staff, parents, community partners, and Policy Council representatives. The system assigns weighted values to vulnerability factors such as disability, homelessness, public assistance, sibling status, transitioning from Early Head Start (EHS), and community or agency referrals.

Children with the highest point totals are prioritized for available slots within their designated preschool catchment areas. OCHS routinely exceeds the federal requirement of enrolling at least 10% of children with disabilities.

To expand access, OCHS includes families receiving SNAP benefits in its eligibility criteria, as authorized by guidance from the Office of Head Start. This change significantly broadened access for income-eligible families and ensures categorical eligibility for a wider range of households.

Recruitment Strategies

OCHS conducts year-round recruitment, with peak outreach between November and May. All staff are considered ambassadors for enrollment and engage in diverse strategies, including community canvassing and event outreach, social media campaigns and digital marketing, partnerships with clinics, hospitals, and human service agencies, engagement of current and former parents through peer advocacy, and support from Policy Council and parent committees.

Multilingual recruitment materials (English and Spanish) are distributed throughout high-traffic community hubs such as health centers, libraries, recreational facilities, and

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schools. Materials are updated annually to reflect current enrollment preschool availability.

Enrollment and Program Options

OCHS offers full-day, preschool-based services for 3- to 5-year-old children across 23 preschools. A portion of slots are designated for working families and those enrolled in school or job training programs. Homeless and foster children, as well as those with IEPs, are prioritized for placement regardless of parental employment or training status.

Enrollment slots are managed centrally, and open seats are filled promptly to maintain full enrollment, in alignment with 45 CFR §1302.15(b).

Attendance Management and Support

Regular attendance is critical for child development and school readiness. OCHS promotes strong attendance practices through education, monitoring, and family support. Key strategies include orientation sessions informing parents of attendance expectations and procedures, daily monitoring of attendance by 9:00 a.m. at each preschool, immediate follow-up for absences by classroom staff and Family Services Workers (FSWs), attendance incentives and family engagement activities. Children whose attendance falls below 90% are identified for individual attendance improvement plans, which include family meetings to identify and remove attendance barriers, provision of transportation assistance, health referrals, or scheduling support, and ongoing monitoring and collaboration between FSWs and preschool supervisors.

Each week, the ERSEA Coordinator reviews attendance data by classroom and preschool. Patterns of chronic absenteeism trigger targeted coaching and professional

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development for preschool staff. Monthly reports are shared with the Policy Council, which disseminates the information to preschool-based parent committees to promote accountability and transparency.

Community Partnerships to Support ERSEA

OCHS collaborates with these key partners to identify and recruit eligible children: Orange County Public Schools Homeless Program, Preschool Diagnostic and Intervention Services (PDIS), and Early intervention agencies serving children with disabilities.

These partners provide referrals and assist families with documentation, streamlining access to Head Start services for vulnerable populations.

OCHS's ERSEA system is comprehensive, data-driven, and community-informed. Through coordinated outreach, rigorous eligibility protocols, and proactive attendance supports, the program ensures that children facing the greatest barriers to school readiness are identified, enrolled, and retained in high-quality early education services.

6.a.i.ii.iii.iv. Education and Child Development Services

OCHS implements the HighScope Preschool Curriculum as the foundation of its education and child development program. Rooted in over 50 years of research, HighScope is a comprehensive, evidence-based curriculum that promotes active learning through child-initiated experiences, intentional adult-child interactions, and consistent daily routines.

The curriculum is structured around eight key content areas: Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Mathematics; Science and Technology;

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Language, Literacy, and Communication; Social Studies; Creative Arts; and Physical Development and Health. These areas are aligned with national early learning standards, Florida's Early Learning and Developmental Standards, Common Core State Standards, and the Head Start ELOF.

At the heart of HighScope is the principle of active learning, a process by which children construct knowledge through purposeful play, exploration, and reflection. Teachers serve as partners in this process—engaging with children by using both verbal and nonverbal communication, scaffolding learning through shared control, encouragement (rather than praise), and problem-solving strategies to support development. The curriculum's plan-do-review sequence fosters executive functioning, decision-making, and self-reflection, giving children the opportunity to take initiative, persist through challenges, and recognize the outcomes of their learning.

OCHS is committed to high-quality implementation of HighScope through robust professional development and fidelity monitoring systems. All Education Curriculum Coordinators have completed formal training in the HighScope approach and provide direct, ongoing training and coaching to instructional staff. Classrooms are observed regularly and assessed to ensure they are organized and functioning in accordance with HighScope principles—such as having clearly defined interest areas, child-accessible materials, predictable routines, and evidence of intentional adult-child interactions. These observations inform reflective coaching cycles, targeted professional development, and continuous quality improvement efforts across all preschools.

Teachers are trained not only to implement the curriculum but also to adapt it to meet individual needs. Lesson plans are individualized using Galileo assessment data

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and informed by children's interests, strengths, and goals. The intentional design of the learning environment allows children to explore materials freely, make choices, and develop autonomy. Teachers serve as facilitators, guiding children through their learning journey while building foundational skills across all domains.

The HighScope curriculum is inclusive by design and provides a strong foundation for supporting children with disabilities or suspected delays. The daily routine's structure, predictable transitions, and consistent adult-child interactions creates an effective environment where all learners, including those who may need additional support with language, self-regulation, or sensory processing, can thrive. Activities like planning and recall time are particularly impactful in supporting expressive language, social-emotional development, and self-confidence. Teachers use embedded learning opportunities and visual supports to reinforce concepts, while adaptive materials and assistive technologies are introduced as needed. Instruction is scaffolded in alignment with each child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to ensure access to the general curriculum.

To strengthen areas where HighScope offers limited guidance such as health, safety, nutrition, cultural responsiveness, and support for dual language learners. OCHS incorporates supplemental, aligned curriculum with targeted enhancements:

- **Nemours BrightStart!:** A supplemental literacy program designed to support emergent reading skills and prevent reading difficulties, particularly for children at risk.
- **DLM Early Childhood Express:** A comprehensive, bilingual curriculum that supports language and literacy development, especially among dual language learners (DLLs), while reinforcing core academic domains.

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- **I Am Moving, I Am Learning (IMIL):** An evidence-informed approach that promotes increased physical activity and healthy nutrition habits through integrated movement and learning activities.
- **Sproutz:** A nutrition and health education resource that helps fill the gap in the ELOF sub-domain of Health, Safety, and Nutrition by promoting wellness through interactive learning experiences.

These enhancements ensure the alignment of our education program with the ELOF and ensure equitable access to high-quality early learning experiences. They also support the individualization required by Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), reinforcing meaningful and accessible learning experiences for all children, including those with diverse cultural backgrounds, home languages, and developmental needs.

OCHS's educational approach is grounded in the HighScope curriculum and enriched through supplemental resources that ensure comprehensive, inclusive, and responsive learning experiences for all children. Through structured training for curriculum coordinators, consistent support for teaching staff, and regular classroom observations, the program maintains high fidelity to its curriculum model while promoting innovation and equity. This ensures every child is well-prepared for kindergarten and lifelong success.

6.a.iii. Evidence of Curriculum Alignment with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF): Ages Birth to Five

OCHS has selected curricula that are research-based and developmentally appropriate and that align with the domains and sub-domains of the Head Start ELOF: Ages Birth to Five. These alignments ensure that children's learning experiences are

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intentional, sequenced, and designed to promote school readiness across all five ELOF domains: cognitive, social-emotional, language, physical, and literacy.

HighScope Preschool Curriculum:

The HighScope Preschool Curriculum aligns comprehensively with the five ELOF domains-Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Language and Communication; Cognition; and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development. HighScope uses domain-specific resources such as the Key Developmental Indicators (KDIs) and Scaffolding Charts to link teaching strategies directly to ELOF goals. Materials like *Essentials of Active Learning* support implementation with fidelity by illustrating how child-centered, hands-on experiences meet developmental benchmarks outlined in the ELOF. While HighScope comprehensively addresses most ELOF sub-domains, it offers limited guidance on Health, Safety, and Nutrition. OCHS addresses this gap through supplemental curricula and community health partnerships.

DLM Early Childhood Express:

The DLM curriculum aligns well with the ELOF, particularly within the domains of Language and Communication, Literacy, and Cognition. Its thematic structure, daily routines, and inclusive instructional strategies provide teachers with a framework that connects directly to ELOF objectives. DLM also includes activities and guidance to support children who are dual language learners and those with special needs, reinforcing its alignment with ELOF requirements for individualization and inclusive practice.

Nemours BrightStart!

Nemours BrightStart! is a targeted literacy intervention aligned with the ELOF's Language and Literacy domains. Designed for children at risk for reading difficulties,

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BrightStart! uses evidence-based practices to build foundational reading skills in a developmentally appropriate way. The curriculum supports key language sub-domains such as phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print concepts all essential to the ELOF's literacy outcomes.

By leveraging these aligned curricula and intentionally layering supplemental supports, OCHS ensures that each child receives a comprehensive and standards-aligned educational experience that prepares them for successful transition to kindergarten and beyond.

6.iv. Supporting Staff to Implement Curriculum with Fidelity

OCHS recognizes that curriculum implementation with fidelity is essential to achieving consistent, high-quality learning experiences that lead to improved child outcomes. The program employs a multi-tiered approach to support staff in understanding and ensures implementation aligns with curriculum intent.

Professional Learning and Coaching:

All OCHS Education and Curriculum Coordinators have received in-depth training in the HighScope approach, including coursework on adult-child interactions, the plan-do-review process, and developmental scaffolding. These coordinators provide ongoing training and technical assistance to classroom teachers and assistant teachers. New staff are introduced to the HighScope fundamentals curriculum during onboarding, while returning staff engage in continuous professional development to refine and deepen their implementation skills.

Classroom Monitoring and Fidelity Checks:

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Curriculum coordinators and education supervisors conduct regular classroom observations using fidelity tools and observation checklists that are aligned with the HighScope Curriculum and supplemental curricula. These visits assess key indicators such as classroom setup, instructional delivery, transitions, and teacher-child interactions. Observers provide real-time feedback, model strategies, and support reflective practice to strengthen implementation.

Use of Data to Inform Practice:

Teachers and supervisors engage in ongoing data analysis through child assessment tools (e.g., Galileo), CLASS observations, and curriculum fidelity reviews. This data informs lesson planning, identifies areas for professional development, and shapes individualized coaching plans. Gaps in fidelity or student progress trigger responsive supports, such as mentoring, peer learning groups, or targeted training sessions.

Curriculum-Integrated Planning:

Lesson plans are reviewed weekly to ensure they reflect HighScope principles and integrate supplemental curriculum components. Education coordinators provide feedback to help teachers align activities with developmental goals, embed language and literacy strategies, and modify instruction for children with special needs or dual language learners.

Fostering a Culture of Intentional Teaching:

Teachers are empowered as intentional facilitators. Through coaching sessions, team meetings, and leadership development, OCHS fosters a culture where staff are encouraged to reflect on their teaching practices, analyze student data, and engage in

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collaborative planning which support deeper fidelity to the curriculum and improve child outcomes.

By investing in staff development, observation and feedback systems, and a strong culture of reflective practice, OCHS ensures that curriculum is implemented with fidelity across classrooms, leading to meaningful and measurable gains in children's school readiness.

6.c.d.

OCHS uses Galileo as its primary child assessment tool. This system provides valid, reliable, and observation-based measures of child development and learning across all ELOF domains. Teachers complete checkpoints three times annually—fall, winter, and spring—and use this data to individualize instruction and monitor growth.

Additional tools include CLASS® (Classroom Assessment Scoring System): Used to assess and enhance teacher-child interactions, and IEP/ISP review protocols for ensuring instructional alignment for children with disabilities.

Assessment data are disaggregated by age, DLL status, disability, and other relevant demographics to ensure equity and to identify learning gaps. Teachers and Education Coordinators use this data to refine instructional strategies, target interventions, and inform professional development.

Assessment results are shared with families during parent-teacher conferences and home visits, where staff collaborate with families to establish and update Individual Child Goals. These goals are embedded in weekly lesson plans and revisited regularly to ensure progress.

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Galileo offers several advantages for assessing young children's development and learning. Key benefits include:

- **Comprehensive and Aligned:** Galileo provides a valid, reliable, and observation-based assessment system that aligns with the ELOF. It ensures educators are consistently monitoring all critical areas of child development, including cognitive, physical, language, literacy, and social-emotional domains.
- **Data-Driven Instruction:** Assessment checkpoints occur three times per year-fall, winter, and spring-allowing teachers to track each child's growth over time. This data enables educators to adjust lesson plans and instructional strategies to meet individual learning needs and optimize classroom outcomes.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Assessment data can be disaggregated by demographics like age, disability status, and dual language learner (DLL) status. These data insights help OCHS identify learning gaps, inform targeted interventions, and ensure all children receive the support they need to thrive.
- **Family Engagement:** Assessment results are shared with families during parent-teacher conferences and home visits, facilitating collaborative goal setting. Teachers and families work together to establish and revise individual child goals, ensuring a strong home-school connection that supports consistent learning experiences.
- **Professional Development Support:** Teachers and Education Coordinators regularly review Galileo data to refine instructional strategies, target interventions, and shape ongoing professional development needs.

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By integrating Galileo into its instructional framework, OCHS strengthens the connection between **assessment and instruction**, ensuring that each child receives the individualized support they need to thrive.

7.a.b. Health and Nutrition Services

OCHS provides a comprehensive, preventive, and responsive health services system that supports the well-being and school readiness of enrolled children, in alignment with Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR §1302 Subpart D). OCHS integrates health, oral health, mental wellness, and nutrition services to promote lifelong healthy habits and early intervention.

Health Screenings and Medical Services

Within 45 days of enrollment, each child receives a series of required health screenings and assessments to identify potential barriers to learning and development. These include developmental screenings to detect cognitive, motor, or behavioral concerns, vision and hearing screenings to identify sensory impairments, physical health assessments to ensure children are meeting age-appropriate milestones, and dental screenings provided by community partners through mobile and on-site dental services.

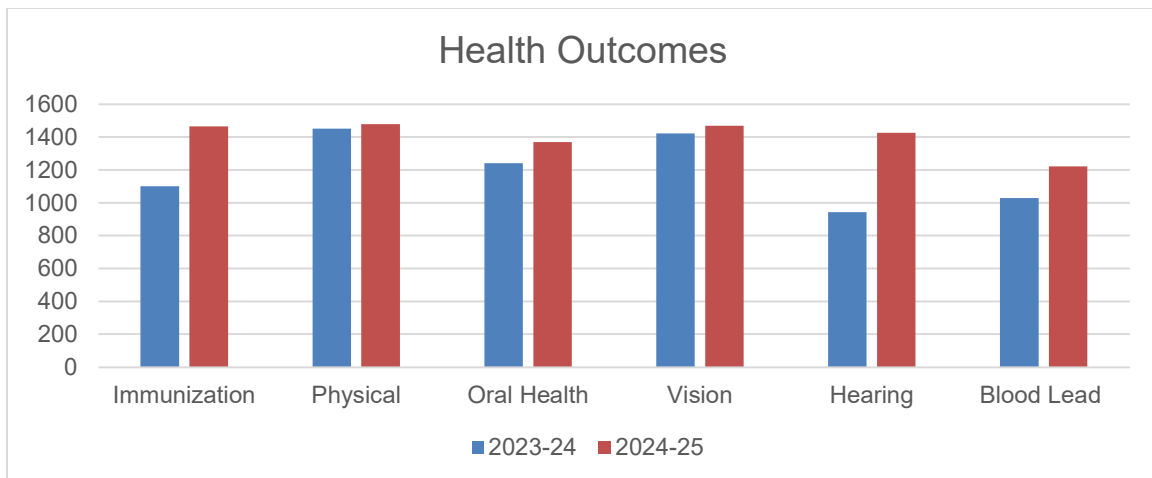
All health data are tracked in ChildPlus, enabling timely follow-up, referral management, and compliance with ongoing monitoring standards. Family Services Workers collaborate with the Health Team to ensure parents understand the importance of medical and dental care and are connected to local providers as needed.

Oral Health Initiatives

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OCHS places a strong emphasis on early oral health, following guidance from the Office of Head Start. The program partners with Orange Blossom Health, True Health Dental, and Big Smiles Dental to deliver on-site dental services through mobile units. With parental consent, each enrolled child receives one dental examination per program year, fluoride varnish application, and basic oral hygiene instruction.

Classroom staff reinforce these efforts with daily supervised toothbrushing and monthly oral health activities, promoting good habits and age-appropriate health literacy. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are in place to ensure documentation, parental communication, and partner accountability. Staff are trained regularly to ensure program fidelity and quality improvement.



Nutrition and Food Access

OCHS provides USDA-compliant, balanced meals and snacks at all preschools to address nutritional gaps and support healthy growth. In response to rising childhood obesity and food insecurity, OCHS integrates the following supports:

- Family nutrition education, including workshops and one-on-one consultations

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- Collaboration with Second Harvest Food Bank to expand food access for high-need families
- Use of nutrition curricula and physical wellness initiatives in the classroom

The “We Can Energize” nutrition curriculum further supports family engagement and behavior change related to healthy eating and physical activity.

Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Support

OCHS embeds mental health services and trauma-informed care throughout its service delivery model. The program uses Trauma Smart, an evidence-based initiative, to equip children, families, and staff with tools to recognize and respond to trauma-related behaviors and stress.

Key features include annual trauma-informed care training for all staff, required onboarding training for new hires, optional participation by interested parents, integration of mental wellness practices into daily routines and curriculum, access to trained mental health professionals for consultation, observation, and support.

Staff receive ongoing guidance on classroom strategies that foster emotional regulation, social-emotional learning, and behavioral resilience. OCHS also partners with licensed mental health providers to offer referrals, parent consultations, and wraparound behavioral health support when needed.

OCHS delivers a comprehensive health program that addresses the physical, dental, nutritional, and emotional well-being of children and families. Through strategic partnerships, routine screening, family-centered education, and trauma-informed practices, OCHS promotes holistic child development and meets all federal requirements for early childhood health services.

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8.a.b.c.d.e. Family and Community Engagement

OCHS recognizes that strong family and community engagement is foundational to achieving school readiness and positive lifelong outcomes for children. In alignment with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR §1302 Subpart E) and the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, OCHS actively promotes meaningful partnerships with parents, caregivers, and local organizations to support family well-being, self-sufficiency, and child development.

Relationship-Based Practices

OCHS employs 27 Family Services Workers (FSWs), two Senior FSWs, and a Program Manager to support families across 23 Head Start preschools. Each preschool fosters a welcoming environment that begins with warm, respectful daily greetings from staff. Building trust and rapport with families is foundational, and all OCHS personnel are expected to contribute to this positive culture.

Key strategies include timely responses to family concerns, consistent communication about child development, and individualized follow-up on family goals and service needs.

FSWs lead the Family Partnership Agreement (FPA) process, helping families set and pursue goals aligned with their strengths, needs, and aspirations. FPAs are informed by the Family Needs Assessment (FNA), which is conducted twice per year within 60 days of enrollment and again by 130 days. Assessments are guided by the PFCE Framework's seven outcome areas and scored using a 1–5 scale to identify levels of stability or crisis. The process is conversational, supportive, and focused on capacity-building.

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Parent Engagement and Leadership Opportunities

OCHS encourages families to take an active role in their child's education and in program governance. Opportunities for parent engagement include Parent Committee Meetings at each preschool, Policy Council participation, including elected parent representatives and alternates, classroom volunteering and support with special events, and monthly preschool activities such as family nights, fatherhood engagement events, and workshops.

Elections for Policy Council occur each fall. Parent representatives share input on program decisions, review data, and serve as a communication bridge between preschool-level committees and the broader governance structure. Parent interest surveys help guide meeting topics, which may include literacy and parenting skills, workforce development and financial literacy, and accessing health insurance, WIC, and other support services.

Parent Education and Research-Based Curriculum

OCHS offers evidence-based parenting curricula designed to enhance family knowledge, support resilience, and strengthen child-parent relationships. All curricula are made available to Head Start families and include 24/7 Dad, Understanding Dad, Incredible Years, For Me, For You, For Later, and Trauma Smart Connections.

These strength-based programs focus on social-emotional well-being, positive discipline, financial literacy, and healing-centered practices. Sessions are interactive, hands-on, and accessible across multiple preschools, allowing families to choose the most convenient location. FSWs receive specialized training to deliver these curriculums effectively.

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Integrated Family Support and Monitoring

FSWs work collaboratively with Education, Health, and Mental Health staff to monitor child progress and ensure alignment with family goals. Bi-weekly meetings between preschool Supervisors and FSWs foster consistent coordination, while quarterly joint meetings ensure program-wide alignment and professional development. For families in crisis, FSWs provide weekly follow-up until the situation stabilizes.

OCHS's approach to goal setting emphasizes parent ownership. Families are engaged in determining their goals, identifying steps, and celebrating progress. Progress is tracked in ChildPlus, and FSWs use the system to ensure timely service delivery and documentation.

Community Partnerships and Referrals

OCHS cultivates a robust network of community partners to support family needs and provide comprehensive wraparound services. FSWs conduct three outreach efforts per month and complete a Community Partnership Log. Interested partners complete a Partnership Interest Form and, upon approval, are added to the agency's resource network.

Current community partners include Orange Blossom Family Health, True Health Community Clinics, Big Smiles Dental, Orange County Public Schools, Second Harvest Food Bank, Children's Home Network, University of Central Florida, Therapy Essentials, Volunteers for Community Impact, Florida State University, Nemours Children's Health, Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, Kinder Konsulting, Pamela Rowe Therapy Providers, Vystar Credit Union, and Kaplan Early Learning.

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These partners provide direct services, staff training, workshops, and family referrals in areas including health, mental wellness, early intervention, adult education, and job placement. Each partner is oriented to Head Start's mission and contributes to holistic service delivery.

Program Goal Alignment

OCHS's family engagement initiatives are guided by Program Goal 5: Strengthen Family Engagement and Support, with the following measurable objectives:

- Achieving 75% parent participation in family workshops annually
- Connect at least 60% of families to social services, job training, or educational opportunities annually

Key action steps include hosting targeted workshops based on family needs, establishing referral systems with local workforce and social service agencies, and using data from FNAs and FPAs to drive continuous improvement.

OCHS's family and community engagement system is rooted in relationship-based practice, parent empowerment, and meaningful collaboration. Through structured support, evidence-based education, and strategic partnerships, families are equipped to become advocates for their children's development and long-term well-being.

9.a.b. Services for Children with Disabilities

Orange County Head Start has established a successful partnership with our local education agency, which allows Orange County Public Schools to provide Preschool Diagnostic and Intervention Services staff to evaluate OCHS children with suspected disabilities. The evaluations take place at the agency's office. Following the evaluation, a

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multidisciplinary meeting is held within thirty days to determine eligibility for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) under IDEA, Part B. Depending on the varying exceptionalities (VE), the child is dual enrolled in both the OCPS VE classroom, and the Head Start program to receive services specific to the written goals in his/her Individual Education Plan (IEP). Alternatively, the child may transition into a full-day placement at OCPS. Both OCHS and PDIS offer on-site assistance to parents, individual teachers, and staff members as resources permit.

Orange County Head Start has consistently met and exceeded the 10% mandate for the program enrollment to be filled with children who are eligible for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). For the current academic year (2024-2025), we have already surpassed this mandate, with our current PIR numbers showing that 13% of funded enrollment consists of children who have met eligibility for an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Through a strong partnership with our Local Education Agency (LEA), we have successfully evaluated and found eligible 196 students for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The predominant diagnosis among these children is non-categorical developmental delay, with 32 children receiving an educational diagnosis of Autism. Our Mental Health and Disability Coordinators work diligently to support the transition of these students to the appropriate school placement. Additionally, 78 children in our program have diagnosed chronic behavioral condition, including 43 with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and 35 with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Furthermore, 130 children are currently benefiting from Individualized Service Plans (ISPs), receiving speech, occupational, or physical therapy services from our

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contracted providers. This reflects the growing demand for specialized instruction and individualized interventions for children with disabilities. We are proud to report that all students receiving specialized services, including IEPs, ISPs, and Behavior Plans, are meeting national benchmarks due to the exceptional support they receive through our program; this is measured and tracked in our Galileo Outcome Reports.

The eligibility priority and selection criteria are established to identify children with suspected or diagnosed disabilities and assign points to ensure that children are afforded the best opportunity for enrollment into the program.

In addition, Head Start has a collaborative partnership with Early Steps, an IDEA Part C provider for children from birth to age 3, which provides transition activities that foster the enrollment of their children into our program. Recruitment materials are provided to area providers who serve children with disabilities, so that they can facilitate appropriate referrals from children receiving services under IDEA, part C.

Orange County Head Start (OCHS) introduced the Behavior Inclusion Specialist position to support children with significant behavioral challenges during the 2021-2022 school year. These behavior specialists implement individualized, data-driven plans based on the Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Young Children (PTR-YC) model. Interventions are comprehensive and grounded in social-emotional developmental knowledge. The Behavior Intervention Specialists collaborate with teachers to develop and implement tailored strategies. The ongoing support meetings include follow-up visits, modeling techniques, and one-on-one sessions with the child to build emotional regulation and social skills. These interventions promote positive classroom adjustment and overall well-being for both the child and their peers.

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In addition to direct student support, Behavior Inclusion Specialists offer professional development for OCHS staff. Training, delivered in small group formats, focuses on behavior management, trauma-informed practices, and social-emotional learning. This approach equips teachers with effective tools to manage classroom behaviors and foster stronger teacher-student relationships. The Behavior Inclusion Specialists participate in multidisciplinary meetings to support parents in addressing concerns related to behavior, emotional regulation, and adverse life experiences (ACEs). The behavior program has expanded significantly in response to growing needs. In 2024, OCHS hired a second Behavior Inclusion Specialist and has recently hired a third Behavior Specialist to ensure high-quality and consistent support to match the needs of our students and families. The team supports students with complex support needs, including ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and other neurodevelopmental or mental health conditions.

In alignment with the updated Head Start Performance Standards released by the Office of Head Start in 2024, OCHS launched a Virtual Parent Support Group in 2024 for caregivers in order to increase their emotional wellness. Based on the interest of the caregivers, the group sessions focus on discussing key developmental milestones of early childhood. This group fosters a supportive community where parents can share experiences, gain knowledge about early childhood disorders, and strengthen their advocacy skills, which in turn supports their mental health wellness.

10.a.b.c. Transition Services

OCHS implements a structured, family-centered transition system that ensures smooth educational continuity as children enter, move through, and exit the program.

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Transition planning is aligned with Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR §1302.70) and designed to minimize disruption and foster school readiness, family engagement, and long-term success.

Transition into Head Start

OCHS supports incoming children through collaborative, informed, and personalized entry procedures. Transitions occur from various settings, including Early Head Start (EHS), private child care programs, home care or community-based settings.

For children transitioning from EHS programs including Children's Home Society and Community Coordinated Care. Referrals are initiated 3–6 months prior to the child's third birthday. During this period, OCHS schedules family orientation sessions to introduce program expectations and environments and supports visits to selected preschools, giving children and families a chance to meet staff and peers. OCHS also initiates eligibility and enrollment documentation, ensuring a timely and smooth entry into preschool services.

Family Services Workers facilitate these processes and offer individualized support, including assistance with documentation, service continuity, and connecting families with additional resources.

Internal Transitions Within Head Start

Children occasionally transition between OCHS preschools due to changes in residence, employment, or family needs. When this occurs, staff coordinate closely to transfer all child and family records securely, communicate relevant accommodations, IEP goals, or support plans, and ensure children and families are welcomed and oriented to their new preschool.

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This internal alignment allows for uninterrupted services and ensures consistency in curriculum, staffing, and developmental monitoring.

Transition to Kindergarten and Other Educational Placements

As children approach kindergarten eligibility, OCHS implements a multi-step strategy to prepare children and families for their next educational setting. This includes:

- **Kindergarten Readiness Activities:** Focused on the development of foundational cognitive, behavioral, and social-emotional skills in line with the Head Start ELOF.
- **Collaborative Partnerships with Orange County Public Schools (OCPS):** Staff coordinate with local elementary schools to align enrollment timelines, share best practices, and facilitate continuity of services—particularly for children with disabilities under IDEA Part B.
- **Transition Packets:** Provided to families and receiving schools, including developmental summaries, health information, and relevant assessments (e.g., IEPs, ISPs, and behavior plans).
- **Parent Engagement Workshops:** Designed to help families understand kindergarten expectations, build advocacy skills, and support their child's emotional and academic readiness.

OCHS transition specialists and Family Services Workers provide ongoing guidance and serve as liaisons between families and school districts during this critical phase.

OCHS's comprehensive transition framework ensures that children and families are fully supported at each point of entry, movement, and exit from the program.

Through strategic planning, community collaboration, and individualized support, OCHS

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promotes educational continuity, emotional security, and school readiness for all children, especially those experiencing vulnerabilities.

11.a.b.c. Services to Enrolled Pregnant Women

OCHS does not offer services to pregnant women.

12.a.b. Transportation Assistance

OCHS does not operate a transportation fleet but takes a proactive, multifaceted approach to ensure that transportation barriers do not prevent any eligible child from accessing Head Start services. For the 2025–2026 program year, OCHS will not provide direct daily transportation services. However, in compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) §1302.102(b) and §1302.102(c), the program ensures that transportation limitations are addressed through strategic planning, partnerships, and individualized family support.

Strategic Preschool Placement and Enrollment Practices

OCHS operates 23 preschools strategically located in neighborhoods where families reside. This community-based service model reduces the need for transportation by enabling most families to walk their children to preschool. OCHS has adopted a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to confirm residential addresses and assign children to the closest preschool typically within a three-mile radius. This practice ensures geographic accessibility and uniform service distribution. Families experiencing homelessness are exempt from the geographic requirement, in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act.

When multiple preschools are within range, Family Services Workers (FSWs) collaborate with families to determine optimal placement based on proximity to work,

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family needs, or specialized support services. This individualized process is key to removing transportation-related enrollment barriers.

Support for Families with Transportation Needs

Although OCHS does not operate its own buses, the program actively assists families in navigating transportation challenges. Family Services Workers provide the following support: guidance on using public transit systems, connection to community transportation voucher programs, coordination with local carpool networks, and referral to local nonprofits offering mobility assistance.

These supports are offered during intake and revisited as part of the family partnership agreement process, ensuring continuous access to services.

Transportation for Dual Enrollment and IEP Students

For children dually enrolled in Head Start and Orange County Public Schools (OCPS), transportation is coordinated with the district. Children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) receive no-cost transportation services provided by OCPS, in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). OCHS maintains regular communication with OCPS transportation personnel to ensure that services are safe, timely, and compliant with Head Start and IDEA requirements.

Contracted Transportation for Field Experiences

While daily transportation is not provided, OCHS contracts with licensed vendors to support transportation for field trips and educational outings. These events are integral to the HighScope curriculum and support school readiness, community awareness, and social-emotional development by providing learning opportunities beyond the classroom.

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Through strategic preschool placement, family-centered enrollment practices, and coordination with community and school district partners, OCHS ensures that transportation is never a barrier to enrollment or participation. This approach fulfills federal requirements while reinforcing OCHS's broader mission of barrier-free access to high-quality early childhood education.

Sub-Section C: Governance, Organizational, and Management Structures

1.a.b.c. Governance

OCHS maintains a well-defined, legally compliant governance and management structure that ensures accountability, transparency, and shared leadership. The governance system includes a Governing Body, Policy Council, and management staff, working together in accordance with the Head Start Act (Sec. 642(c)), HSPPS Subpart A, and the Head Start Management Systems Wheel.

Governing Body (Orange County Board of County Commissioners)

The Orange County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) serves as the official governing body for OCHS. As defined by Section 642(c)(1) of the Head Start Act, the BCC has legal and fiscal responsibility for administering the program, ensuring that all services comply with federal regulations and standards.

Responsibilities include approval of grant applications, budgets, and program plans, oversight of internal controls and risk management, ensuring financial audits and corrective actions, monitoring for legal and ethical compliance, and approving personnel policies and major program changes.

The BCC receives monthly reports on program operations, financial status, enrollment, and self-assessment findings. A designated liaison from the County's

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Community and Family Services Department ensures consistent communication between the program and governing body.

The BCC is composed of seven elected members, including the mayor and six District Commissioners, each serving staggered four-year terms. Commissioners for Districts 2, 4, and 6 are elected during one cycle (e.g., 2014, 2018, 2022), while those for Districts 1, 3, and 5 are elected during presidential election years (e.g., 2012, 2016, 2020, 2024). This staggered structure promotes continuity in governance and decision-making across multiple terms.

The BCC includes members with deep expertise in the key areas outlined in the Head Start Act. For instance, Commissioner Nicole Wilson of District 1 is a licensed attorney with extensive experience in public interest law. She has supported individuals and nonprofit environmental organizations in navigating complex local, state, and federal legal frameworks—a background that enhances the legal and compliance oversight of the Head Start program. Commissioner Kelly Martinez Semrad, Ph.D., who represents District 5, brings valuable expertise in education, policy, and research. As a professor at the University of Central Florida, an award-winning researcher, and an advocate for smart growth and sustainability, she contributes a deep understanding of educational systems and evidence-based policymaking. Her leadership ensures the integration of academic insight and strategic vision in program development and evaluation. Additionally, Commissioner Christine Moore, formerly a member of the Orange County School Board for ten years, offers an important bridge between early childhood education and K-12 systems. Her experience contributes to the program's alignment with local education priorities, school readiness, and public-school partnerships.

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Commissioner Maribel Gomez Cordero exemplifies this uniform model. A former Head Start parent and Policy Council member from Ceiba, Puerto Rico. Commissioner Gomez Cordero has dedicated her life to public service and brings a vital cultural lens and firsthand understanding of the impact Head Start can have on children and families especially within the region's diverse Latino communities.

Policy Council

The Policy Council is composed of elected parents of currently enrolled children and community representatives. This council is a critical component of the shared governance model and exercises decision-making authority as outlined in 45 CFR §1301.3 and §642(c)(2) of the Head Start Act.

Council Responsibilities Include approving program policies and procedures, participating in the development of funding applications, providing input on personnel decisions (hiring, termination), engaging in annual self-assessments and program planning, and advising on community partnerships and program design.

Members receive ongoing training in governance, program standards, ethics, and budgeting. Meetings are held monthly, and minutes are shared with preschool-level parent committees.

While the BCC's structure exempts Orange County from the specific composition requirements, the program proactively ensures representation from critical sectors through the Policy Council and key community partnerships. For example, representatives from the VyStar Credit Union offer financial and fiscal management expertise at the community level. A representative from the Early Childhood and Preschool Division of Orange County Public Schools also serves on the Policy Council,

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bringing valuable insight into curriculum, special education, and alignment with public education standards. The Policy Council includes a representative and an alternate from each Head Start preschool, and all are current parents of enrolled children. Community representatives on the Council are past parents or key partner agency representatives, ensuring both continuity and a strong connection to the Head Start mission. This structure meets and exceeds the intent of the Act by incorporating lived experience, professional expertise, and collaborative agency engagement.

Processes Governing Body

OCHS implements a shared governance model that ensures collaborative decision-making between the Governing Body, Policy Council, and executive leadership. To maintain program integrity and accountability major decisions require dual approval from both the Policy Council and Board of County Commissioners, program reports (enrollment, budget, compliance, monitoring) are disseminated to all governance levels monthly, and conflicts of interest and confidentiality are addressed through policies aligned with federal mandates.

This governance model supports a culture of transparency, family engagement, and mutual accountability.

To ensure effective and transparent governance, the BCC participates in a structured process of information dissemination and decision-making that aligns with the requirements and best practices of Head Start. This process includes monthly Program Information Reports, which provide detailed updates on enrollment, attendance, financial data, and service outcomes. Each October, during Head Start Awareness Month, the Head Start Director delivers an annual “State of Head Start” address to the Board. Prior

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to votes on consent agenda items involving Head Start operations or budgets, commissioners participate in individual briefings to ensure fully informed decision-making. Commissioner Scott currently serves as the Policy Council liaison and attends monthly meetings, fostering a direct link between the Council and the BCC.

Additionally, the BCC reviews quarterly performance data from the Performance-Based Measurement System (PBMS), which includes metrics on child outcomes, attendance, and cost efficiency. The Board also receives ongoing updates on program implementation, including progress on strategic goals, results from federal monitoring, and child and family outcome data. When items requiring BCC approval arise—such as contracts, grants, or compliance-related matters, Head Start management provides focused briefings to ensure that commissioners have the necessary context and detail to make informed decisions.

2.a.b.c.d.e. Human Resources Management

Organizational Structure and Staffing Adjustments

Over the past five years, Orange County Head Start has made several strategic staffing changes to strengthen organizational capacity, ensure compliance, and improve program effectiveness. These changes include hiring two Behavior Inclusion Specialists and one Senior Behavior Inclusion Specialist to support children with behavioral challenges, adding a Mentor Coach to enhance professional development for instructional staff, and reclassifying Licensed Practical Nurse positions to Certified Nursing Assistant roles to better meet service needs. Additionally, the Maintenance Technician role was upgraded to Maintenance Supervisor to improve oversight of facility operations.

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The Quality Assurance team expanded with the addition of a Quality Assurance Data Coordinator and a Quality Assurance Training Coordinator. These positions have strengthened data integrity and enhanced staff development, aligning the program more closely with federal expectations.

Looking ahead, Orange County Head Start proposes limited, strategic adjustments to its organizational structure during this grant period. A revised organizational chart reflects these updates, including changes to supervisory flow and communication pathways.

To align with updated Head Start Program Performance Standards, the Preschool Supervisor position will be renamed Preschool Director to better reflect the role's responsibilities in overseeing preschool-level operations and high-quality classrooms. The Field Operations Supervisor position, which oversees the Preschool Directors, will also be reviewed for potential updates in title and job description to reflect its leadership responsibilities.

To meet the requirements of 45 CFR §1302.52(d), which mandates manageable caseloads for staff supporting families, Orange County Head Start proposes the addition of eleven new Family Services Workers. These hires are a priority contingent upon funding availability. The program also plans to explore the creation of a new Family Services Worker position that would require a Family Services Credential but not a college degree. This role, with a lower pay grade and specialized scope, would help expand services cost-effectively while ensuring quality and compliance.

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Additionally, the program is evaluating the creation of a new position dedicated solely to family engagement and community partnership development. Even if funding is not immediately available, this role will remain a priority as resources allow.

Orange County Head Start is also requesting a title change for four Senior Family Services Workers who specialize in supporting mental health and disabilities. These positions would be reclassified as Mental Health and Disabilities Coordinators, with revised job descriptions reflecting the increased specialization required by recent federal updates. The three supervisory Senior Family Services Workers overseeing this area are also under review for potential reclassification.

Remaining Senior Family Services Worker positions are proposed to be retitled as Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) Coordinators to better reflect their core responsibilities and importance in meeting compliance benchmarks.

A request is also being made to reclassify an existing Administrative Specialist role. This position, initially focused on basic administrative duties, now manages vital aspects of the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program, including contract management, application processing, attendance, and state audits. It supports over 545 enrolled children and administers over \$1.5 million in state funds. The reclassification request aligns the title and compensation with the expanded scope of duties. Importantly, this role is fully state-funded and will not require additional county resources.

To support classroom stability and staffing compliance, Orange County Head Start will also explore creating a Substitute Teacher Support Program. This initiative would ensure

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classrooms remain in compliance and promote workforce sustainability and continuity of care.

Through these updates, Orange County Head Start reinforces its commitment to continuous improvement, responsive services, and full compliance with federal regulations.

Compensation Structure and Pay Equity

Orange County Head Start operates under Orange County Government's comprehensive compensation plan, which supports recruitment and retention of high-quality early childhood professionals. The plan includes structured salary scales, competitive benefits, professional development opportunities, and wellness initiatives that make the program comparable to local ECE providers and school districts.

Salaries are based on job classification, education, and experience. The Human Resources Department manages pay adjustments and ensures transparency through public salary ranges. Employees receive benefits such as medical plans, paid leave, parental leave, employee assistance programs, and retirement options including a 457(b) plan and Florida Retirement System (FRS) participation. Wellness programs like myOCWellness incentivize health engagement and help reduce insurance premiums.

Compensation strategies are informed by local labor market surveys, wage studies (e.g., the Florida Head Start Wage Study), and collaboration with county departments. These tools help ensure salaries remain competitive and fair. Orange County Head Start also participates in quarterly compensation review meetings with the Office of Management and Budget and County Attorney to submit reclassification proposals and salary adjustments.

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Over a decade ago, a separate salary table was developed for education staff, including teachers, assistants, and aides. This table is reviewed annually and is used to ensure parity with local public schools. Currently, many teacher assistants earn more than paraprofessionals in the local education agency.

In addition, a salary equity study is underway to assess compensation for Senior Family Services Workers and compare their roles to similar positions countywide and across the region. This is part of a broader effort to maintain internal fairness and market alignment.

The program is preparing to meet the federal mandate requiring Head Start educator pay to align with public school salaries by August 2031. Orange County Head Start is on track to meet this requirement. The program will work closely with Human Resources to develop a transparent and data-driven pay structure. A formal market study will be conducted to confirm current alignment and ensure compliance.

Background Screening and Personnel Safety

Orange County Head Start uses a rigorous background screening system for all staff, consultants, and contractors, in line with Florida Statute 435.04 and County Policy 104.2. The Human Resources Division initiates a Level II background check after a contingent job offer. This includes fingerprinting, FDLE and FBI criminal checks, abuse registry checks, and submission of a Good Moral Character attestation.

Out-of-state criminal and abuse records are also reviewed for any applicant who has lived outside Florida in the past five years. Employment cannot begin until all clearances are received. Results are processed through the AHCA Clearinghouse, and documentation is added to each candidate's file.

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All staff are rescreened every five years, which includes new fingerprinting and updated registry reviews. The Education Administrative Specialist maintains the AHCA roster and ensures timely updates, including termination dates.

Employees must report arrests immediately. Disqualifying offenses result in disciplinary action up to termination. If a disqualified employee is working at an OCPS campus, Orange County Public Schools is notified within 24 hours.

Each supervisor maintains a Personnel Tracking Log that includes screening dates and attestation status. Files include the CF-FSP 5131 form and updated background records in ChildPlus. These procedures ensure full regulatory compliance and safeguard children and staff across all preschools.

Orientation and Onboarding

Orange County Head Start provides a thorough orientation process for all new staff, consultants, and volunteers. All employees first attend Orange County Government's New Employee Orientation, which includes county policies, benefits, and structure. Following that, a program-specific orientation is conducted to introduce the Head Start mission, organizational chart, SOPs, Code of Conduct, school calendar, and key contacts.

Each new hire is introduced to service area representatives and management staff. Preschool-specific orientation takes place at the assigned preschool and includes the new employee checklist. Supervisors ensure all required steps are completed.

Consultants receive a similar orientation packet and meet with service area leads.

Volunteers and interns are oriented by the Head Start supervisor and complete the DCF

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Volunteer Acknowledgement Form. These processes ensure all individuals supporting the program are aligned with its mission and compliance standards.

Staff Development and Continuous Learning

For the past five years, professional development has remained a strategic focus. The Training Coordinator has developed a new action plan aligned with federal priorities. Staff have access to the myOCLearn system, which offers virtual courses, face-to-face sessions, and yearlong leadership development.

The program uses a train-the-trainer model to ensure internal capacity for delivering consistent and high-quality training. Key federal resources, including HeadStart.gov, are used to reinforce best practices.

Orange County Head Start remains committed to a learning-centered culture that promotes growth, consistency, and long-term workforce sustainability across all service areas.

Management Systems Wheel Alignment

The program integrates the Head Start Management Systems Wheel into its internal operations, ensuring that planning, communication, human resources, and evaluation work together cohesively. Management systems are documented and reviewed annually as part of the Self-Assessment and Continuous Quality Improvement Plan.

Through this robust and uniform governance model, OCHS ensures that its oversight is not only compliant with federal regulations but also representative of the community it serves. The integration of elected leadership, community expertise, parent

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participation, and transparent decision-making positions OCHS as a leader in shared governance and responsible public stewardship.

3.a.b.c.d. Program Management and Quality Improvement - Needed

OCHS implements a comprehensive program management and quality improvement system that ensures ongoing oversight, accountability, and responsiveness across all service areas. Aligned with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR §1302 Subpart J), OCHS's management infrastructure supports data-driven decision-making, promotes staff development, maintains financial integrity, and fosters continuous progress toward program goals.

Oversight, Correction, and Progress Monitoring

Program oversight is a shared responsibility involving senior leadership, the Board of County Commissioners, the Policy Council, and program staff. Together, these entities review performance data, assess progress toward strategic goals, and ensure early identification of concerns requiring corrective action.

Ongoing monitoring occurs at multiple levels. Routine daily, monthly, and bi-annual reviews—such as classroom walkthroughs, facility inspections, and service delivery audits—ensure that teaching quality, health and safety practices, and family supports remain in full compliance with Head Start requirements. Each strategic goal is supported by defined implementation steps, responsible staff leads, and timelines for completion. The ChildPlus data system is used to track services, generate performance reports, and monitor child- and program-level outcomes.

To support continuous learning and improvement, data are collected through various tools including classroom observations, staff surveys, stakeholder focus groups,

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and family engagement reports. This information is aggregated and reviewed to identify trends, assess progress, and inform future actions. Performance updates are shared transparently with staff and stakeholders through regular reports and meetings.

In the event of performance gaps or noncompliance, OCHS initiates structured corrective actions. These include root cause analysis, individualized retraining, and follow-up documentation to ensure resolution. The management team also conducts biannual self-assessments and quarterly progress reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of systems in meeting goals related to school readiness, health and safety, and family engagement.

Data-Driven Staff Development and Retention

OCHS's management system prioritizes workforce development, recognizing that high-quality teaching and consistent staffing are essential to achieving strong child outcomes. All staff collaborate with supervisors to develop individualized professional development plans informed by observations, evaluation results, and self-reflections. A centralized learning platform, MYOCLearn, tracks training completion, certifications, and professional development hours to ensure compliance and support continuous growth. Mentorship and coaching are integral components of the system. Teachers receive regular support from mentor coaches, who use classroom data to guide instructional improvement through goal setting, modeling, and reflective feedback. Ongoing supervision is embedded in the program's culture through structured one-on-one meetings, performance reviews, and collaborative goal monitoring. Supervisors provide feedback and identify additional supports, ensuring that staff receive timely interventions when challenges arise.

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To inform broader workforce strategies, leadership analyzes program-wide data on staff turnover, engagement, and training completion on a quarterly basis. Exit interviews and stay surveys are conducted to understand the root causes of staff departures and identify opportunities to strengthen retention through improved culture, recognition, and support.

OCHS actively supports career advancement by offering financial assistance for degree attainment, clearly defined career pathways, and targeted professional development aligned with individual goals. A mentorship program is in development to provide onboarding and career coaching to new and advancing staff. The program also regularly celebrates staff achievements to build morale and acknowledge contributions to program success.

Strategic Budgeting, Staffing, and Service Delivery

Financial and staffing decisions are strategically aligned with OCHS's five-year goals to ensure sufficient capacity for high-quality care, comprehensive services, and professional growth opportunities.

The budget process integrates feedback from staff and leadership, with ongoing evaluation of wage competitiveness to support retention efforts. Investments in professional development, instructional materials, and supplemental staffing are prioritized to ensure that classroom and service area needs are met.

OCHS maintains fixed staff shifts to support consistent staffing patterns, stable classroom environments, and continuity of care. The leadership team monitors staffing ratios and vacancies, making adjustments to minimize disruptions. Although the

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availability of floating staff remains a challenge, staffing data is used to inform long-term planning for substitute coverage, training release time, and emergency support.

The school calendar includes non-student workdays to accommodate professional development. A hybrid training model is being introduced to provide greater flexibility, allowing staff to complete trainings in-person or online depending on their learning style and availability. This approach minimizes classroom disruption and supports scalability. A multidisciplinary staffing model ensures that all service areas are supported through coordinated team meetings, cross-functional planning, and shared accountability. Regular collaboration between education, health, family services, disabilities, and mental health teams ensures that services are delivered comprehensively and responsively.

Budget allocations are reviewed regularly by the management team, who reallocate funds as necessary to address emerging staffing, training, or operational needs. The program is also exploring additional funding sources to expand staffing capacity and invest in staff wellness and development initiatives.

Through integrated oversight systems, strategic planning, and a strong culture of continuous improvement, OCHS ensures high-quality service delivery, compliance with federal standards, and responsive support to the children, families, and staff it serves. Data use, supervision, and intentional resource allocation underpin a program design that advances school readiness and family success while sustaining a committed and capable workforce.

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Section II: Budget and Justification Narrative

This section provides a line-item justification for the proposed budget categories in accordance with 45 CFR Part 75.

(Aligned with 45 CFR §75.414, Uniform Guidance, and HSPPS Subpart J – Program Management and Quality Improvement)

OCHS has developed a comprehensive budget for the 2025–2026 program year to support the delivery of high-quality, barrier-free early childhood education services to 1,536 Head Start-eligible children across 23 preschools. The following budget narrative provides a detailed justification for all proposed costs and demonstrates alignment with allowable cost principles, reasonableness, and necessity in accordance with federal guidance and the delegation of signing authority authorized by the Director of Community and Family Services.

A. Personnel

Personnel costs support 300 full-time and part-time staff members directly engaged in delivering services, including teachers, teacher assistants, family service workers, health and nutrition staff, disabilities coordinators, and support staff.

Personnel costs constitute the largest portion of the OCHS budget and reflect the value placed on retaining a highly qualified, stable workforce. Salaries are aligned with regional benchmarks and include compensation for teachers, family service workers, health and nutrition staff, mental health consultants, and management personnel. Fringe benefits include health insurance, retirement contributions, and wellness incentives designed to promote staff well-being (aligned with Program Goal 3). These expenses

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ensure consistent, high-quality care and instruction, reduce staff turnover, and support positive outcomes for children.

All salaries are competitive with the local early childhood education market and are in alignment with Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) and Orange County Government wage policies.

B. Fringe Benefits

Fringe benefits include the following:

- Health, dental, vision insurance
- FICA and Medicare
- State retirement contributions
- Workers' compensation and unemployment insurance
- Life insurance and short-term disability

These benefits are essential for staff retention and align with Orange County government employment policies.

C. Travel and Training

Travel costs are budgeted for required staff attendance at federal, regional, and state Head Start conferences and training workshops. Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) funds support professional development aligned with Program Goals 1 and 4. This includes early childhood education best practices, mental health and wellness training, and digital literacy workshops for staff and families. These investments enhance staff capacity and directly contribute to improved child development and family engagement.

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Travel funds support staff attendance at required Head Start regional conferences and training events, in-county mileage reimbursement for family home visits, screenings, and outreach (per IRS rate), and staff participation in the Region IV Head Start Association Annual Conference, as mandated for professional development and compliance training.

All travel is pre-approved and supported with detailed justifications, in alignment with **2 CFR §200.474**.

D. Equipment

No major equipment purchases are anticipated for this grant cycle. OCHS defines equipment as tangible personal property with a per-unit cost of \$5,000 or more and a useful life of more than one year. Any future needs for equipment will follow procurement procedures and require prior approval.

E. Supplies

Budgeted supplies include instructional materials, classroom consumables, child development assessment tools, and hygiene products. Based on findings in the Community Assessment regarding food insecurity and health issues, OCHS prioritizes adequate hygiene and nutritional supplies to support overall child wellness. Equipment purchases include child-safe furniture, educational technology tools, and playground materials that foster safe and engaging learning environments.

Supplies are categorized into:

- Classroom Supplies: Educational materials, manipulatives, paper goods, art supplies
- Health & Safety Supplies: PPE, thermometers, first aid, sanitation supplies

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- Administrative Supplies: Computers, toner, office consumables
- Child Nutrition Supplies: Meal service items, utensils, serving containers

Supplies are budgeted based on historical usage, enrollment levels, and regulatory standards.

F. Contractual

OCHS contracts with licensed service providers for mental health consultation, dental screenings, health and nutrition services, and disabilities evaluation. These contracted professionals ensure timely services for children and families and meet all Head Start Performance Standards. Additionally, partnerships with Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) and local agencies allow OCHS to extend its reach in delivering services, particularly for dual-enrollment children and children with special needs.

Contractual services include:

- Mental Health Consultants (licensed practitioners)
- Screening services (hearing, vision, developmental)
- IT & Data Support (maintenance of ChildPlus, tech upgrades)
- Facilities Maintenance (cleaning, pest control, security for leased preschools)
- Interpreter Services for dual language learners and families with limited English proficiency

All vendors are procured using Orange County procurement policies and follow federal regulations under 2 CFR §200.317–326.

G. Construction

Facility-related expenses include rent for leased preschools, utilities, and routine maintenance. Although no new construction is planned, funds have been allocated for

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minor facility modifications, such as the installation of playground shade structures at high-risk preschools identified in the Community Assessment. These improvements support child safety, comply with federal and local regulations, and ensure high-quality early learning environments.

There are no construction or renovation activities included in this application. Any future construction needs would be submitted separately in accordance with Head Start Facilities Guidance and 45 CFR Part 1303 Subpart E.

H. Other

- Parent Engagement Events and Supplies
- Training Materials and Workshops
- Outreach and Marketing for ERSEA
- Staff Wellness and Retention Activities
- Audit Fees and Licensing Costs
- Staff and Parent Background Screenings

These costs are allowable and necessary to meet Head Start Act Section 642 and HSPPS Subpart F.

I. Indirect Costs

Shared costs are distributed proportionally based on program benefit. Indirect costs are calculated under the 10% de minimis rate, as approved by Orange County Government. Program leadership regularly monitors cost allocation to ensure compliance, accuracy, and transparency in all financial transactions. OCHS claims indirect costs at the federally approved through a cost allocation plan covering shared administrative expenses (HR, finance, IT support). The indirect cost base and rate are

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consistent with 45 CFR §75.414 and a current copy of the cost allocation plan is included in the appendices.

The proposed budget is aligned with program goals and responsive to the findings of the Community Assessment. Each expenditure category has been carefully developed to ensure the highest impact for children and families, while also supporting continuous improvement and fiscal accountability. The budget supports quality staffing, robust services, and the infrastructure required to maintain full compliance with Head Start Performance Standards.

OCHS has developed a comprehensive budget for the 2025–2026 program year to support the delivery of high-quality, barrier-free access to early childhood education services to 1,536 Head Start-eligible children across 23 preschools. This budget narrative provides a detailed justification for all proposed costs and demonstrates alignment with allowable cost principles, reasonableness, and necessity in accordance with federal guidance and the delegation of signing authority authorized by the Director of Community and Family Services.