



NEW CASTLE COUNTY Head Start, Inc.

Fall 2024

Head Start Happenings Newsletter

We're delighted to welcome you to the latest edition of the Head Start Happenings newsletter! With the arrival of autumn and the changing colors of the season, our centers are filled with the laughter and curiosity of our young learners, making each day an adventure.

In this newsletter, you learn more about our program, including the exciting news of positive things from the 2024 Federal Review and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Review.

We are committed to providing exceptional early childhood education and support services for children ages birth to 5 years and their families. Please schedule a time to visit a New Castle County Head Start, Inc. (NCCHS) center near you to learn more about how we improve lives in Delaware!



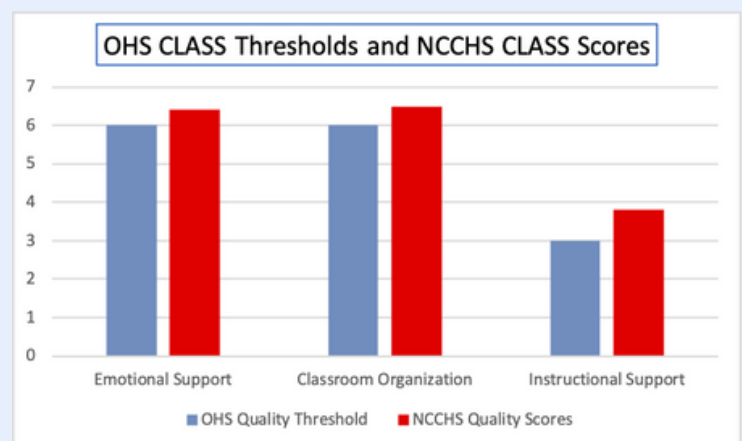
Wendy Marsilii,
Executive Director

NCCHS Successfully Undergoes Two Federal Monitoring Reviews

All Head Start programs must undergo periodic federal reviews to ensure compliance with the Head Start Performance Standards and the Head Start Act. In February 2024, the Office of Head Start (OHS) conducted a Focus Area 2 monitoring review of NCCHS. This comprehensive evaluation assessed the program's performance, progress, and adherence to federal requirements.

A team of three onsite reviewers spent a week analyzing several key areas of the NCCHS program, conducting interviews with staff, parents, and members of the program's governing bodies, and completing a detailed examination of program data.

In March 2024, OHS conducted an evaluation of NCCHS using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Through in-class observations, classroom quality was assessed and scored against established thresholds to ensure the highest standards. NCCHS not only met but exceeded all thresholds, demonstrating its dedication to excellence in early childhood education and the unwavering efforts of staff members to continually improve the program.



Head Start Stories



Eugenia Simmons

Full Circle Life by Eugenia Simmons, CDA Coach Facilitator

I will never forget the day I was off to a new adventure of attending a school for the first time. I was standing at the designated bus stop at the entrance of the Rose Hill Community, just off New Castle Avenue-Route 9, with two of my cousins, other neighborhood children my age, and several grown-up adults supervising us. We all had a bookbag strapped on our backs, while some of the grown-ups wore slippers as we waited for the big yellow bus to arrive. Our parents had informed us that we would attend a school called "Head Start." At the time, I didn't know what to expect since I was so used to attending my grandmother's daycare program at her house.

During her tenure in the early 1970s, my grandmother and a few other ladies in the neighborhood employed at Head Start were instrumental in recruiting any child between the ages of 3 and 5. After my grandmother resigned from the Rosehill Community Center as a Head Start teacher, she established her home daycare center. Many working mothers relied on and trusted my grandmother to care for their children because she had raised seven of her own.

I remember my grandmother explaining to my mother that a new early education program for children would provide them with nutritious free meals and help them find families' needed resources, e.g., electric bills, Section 8 housing, food box pick-up locations, etc. Although I was sad to leave my grandmother's house, I was happy my cousins Heather and Shawn and others from my neighborhood would join me in the program.

Soon, the big yellow school bus pulled up. I recall waving goodbye to the adults standing nearby and then quickly arriving at Rosehill Community Center. And boy, I had a fun time from day one. I'll never forget my teacher, Mrs. Sondonia Parker. She was tall, pretty, and nice and always gave us the best hugs upon arriving and leaving. We played, ate, sang songs, and learned our ABCs and 123's. Being able to attend the Head Start program was vital in my life. My mother later told me that she was amazed about how much I was learning and how well I was adjusting to coming out of my shy shell.

Fast forward many years, and the Head Start program became known as "New Castle County Head Start" (NCCHS). I have gone full circle, from enrolling at age four to working here today. I started as a teacher and center at the Claymont center, then transitioned to a center coordinator role at Rosehill Center. Later, I moved to the administrative office as an administrative assistant, and currently, I am a CDA coach facilitator, mentoring teacher assistants to earn an early childhood credential.

I'm still gratefully employed at NCCHS and have truly enjoyed my ten years! I wouldn't trade any knowledge, skills, friends, and co-workers for anything in the world; we are like family! I am amazed at our fantastic NCCHS staff. So many of us are dedicated, humble, and caring. And when I say that I love working for this agency, I genuinely mean that I love working for this agency!

Head Start Stories

From NCCHS to Success: How Early Support Shaped a Young Boy's Future

For Dori Fostok, moving from Texas to Delaware in 2011 was a major life change. She relocated to care for her aging parents, bringing along her young son, Adam, who was just shy of his fourth birthday. At the time, Adam had never attended school and was struggling with delayed speech. Dori knew he needed help, but with her responsibilities to her family, she felt stretched thin. That's when NCCHS became a lifeline.



Adam Fostok

Adam joined the Lambson Center at NCCHS, and the impact was nearly immediate. Over the next 1.5 years, his speech and communication skills improved, and he developed a love for learning. The teachers at NCCHS did far more than teach the basics—they became "bonus parents," taking time to learn about Adam's interests and encouraging him to explore art, music, and other new opportunities. "They weren't just teaching ABCs," Dori recalls. "They taught him how to listen, be a good friend, and work well in groups. They provided the care and instruction he needed while I focused on my family."

When it was time for kindergarten, Adam was ready. NCCHS had laid a strong foundation for his academic growth, and he transitioned seamlessly into school life. "NCCHS took so much stress off my shoulders as a parent," Dori says. "I knew Adam was in good hands, receiving the support he needed to thrive."

Today, Adam is a senior at Wilmington Charter High School, carrying a remarkable 4.5 GPA. His list of accomplishments is impressive: he has created after-school tutoring programs for local elementary schools, won bronze in a STEM research challenge at the University of Delaware, and placed first in the state in the Odyssey of the Mind competition. Adam's goal is to become a neurologist.

Dori believes Adam's success wouldn't have been possible without NCCHS. "During a challenging time, they gave us exactly what we needed. I'm so grateful for everything they provided," she says. For Adam, NCCHS was more than a preschool; it was the starting point for a journey of lifelong learning and achievement. His story is a testament to the power of early support and the life-changing impact NCCHS has on children and families.

DID YOU KNOW?

NCCHS offers free Training for Early Care and Education (TECE) I and II classes for enrolled parents. The training provides fundamental knowledge for persons working with young children and qualifies them to pursue a career in the Early Childhood Education field. During the 2023-2024 school year, ten parents graduated, including three staff that are parents, two staff, and five parents.



What Parents Say

We are deeply grateful to the many current and former volunteers who contribute to the success of our program every single day. Recently, we asked parents to share their experiences with NCCHS. Here's what they had to say.

Describe your child's experience in his/her classroom this year.

- Thank you for providing such a welcoming and enriching environment for my child this school year. Her experience in the classroom has been nothing short of wonderful. She has met with caring and dedicated teachers. – O. Adebisi
- Your commitment to excellence has given our child the best foundation. We are grateful. Watching our child flourish under your guidance and leadership has been a joy. Thank you for all you do. As parents, we sleep better knowing our kids are in school, led by a dedicated individual like you. – Ian's parents



Early Head Start staff and families enjoyed a field trip to Fifer Orchards.

Describe your experience with the Head Start program.

- My children were supported and able to grow in all aspects. I had a pleasant relationship with all the staff as well. – A. Rodriguez
- As a mother, I recommend the program so that children can learn to share with other children, discover what a classroom is like, and learn how to interact with their classmates and teachers. – Melendez
- I feel the program gave her a sense of independence, and prepared her for kindergarten. – N. Smith
- I just love what this program does for the kids. Every kid is known by name, and no kid is left out. – Williams

What else would you like to say about NCCHS?

- I would like to say I am a fan of the Head Start philosophy. The support and advocacy that has been received have benefited our family. – Kysha
- I'm going to miss this school next year. It was very educational for my child and family.
- I appreciate how my daughter's teachers were with her. They were so incredibly kind and compassionate.
- I think the best thing was the diversity in the classroom. My child didn't feel alone because multiple languages were used.

What Parents To Say

What is your favorite thing about Head Start?

- The best thing about the program was the consistency of the lead teacher. – L. Williams
- I value the open communication with the staff about my child's needs.
- The teachers are involved every step of the way.
- This program's preparation for the kids truly prepares them for the transition to school. My child is ready for school and has the necessary tools to excel. – Williams
- The best thing about this program for us (parents/grandparents) is that Head Start allows our child to develop social-emotional skills and reinforces cognitive development. – Smith
- The best thing that has happened to us this year is that my daughter has good teachers and excellent coordinators, and they do a good job with the children. – Melendez
- The best part is the communication between parents and teachers.

NCCHS Honors Jeffrey E. Benatti and Dr. Carroll B. Shannon

On April 12, 2024, NCCHS held a ceremony at its Bear Center to celebrate the remarkable contributions of former Executive Director Jeffrey E. Benatti and long-time Board of Directors member Dr. Carroll B. Shannon.

In recognition of Benatti's 33 years of service, the Bear Center was named the Jeffrey E. Benatti Center. For Shannon, NCCHS renamed its six staff wellness rooms Carroll's Place. Board member Michael Staman reflected on the honorees' legacy: "I'm humbled and honored to be part of this organization and to recognize Jeff Benatti and Carroll Shannon, who have tirelessly served this organization for multiple decades."



Dr. Carroll Shannon (left) and Jeffrey Benatti pictured together at the ceremony.

Program Awards

Ethel Cooper Award Recipient: Leslie Lee

Employee of the Year Recipients:

- Christine Potter – Absalom Jones
- Bertina Sullivan – Jeffrey E. Benatti
- Karen MacNab – Claymont
- Julena Brown – Lambson
- Brittney Banks – Manor Park
- Yuri Santizo-Carrizosa – Early Head Start



Wendy Marsilii (right) presents Leslie Lee with the Ethel Cooper Award.

Head Start Stories



Joanne Lambert

A Grandmother's Journey: From Guardian to Staff Member

Joanne Lambert's story with NCCHS is one of resilience, transformation, and giving back. A devoted grandmother to four children, Joanne's journey with NCCHS began nearly a decade ago when she became the guardian of her grandson Mason.

She first learned about NCCHS from a neighbor. She wanted Mason to have the care and support he needed. Over two years at NCCHS, Mason experienced significant growth—improved speech and enhanced social and emotional skills. When it was time for kindergarten, Joanne felt confident that he was well-prepared, thanks to the resources and guidance NCCHS provided.

Ten years later, Joanne found herself in a similar situation with another grandson, Brayden. At age two, Brayden struggled with speech and was placed in a baby room at his daycare. Recognizing he needed more support, Joanne enrolled him at NCCHS when he turned three. From day one, NCCHS provided immediate assistance, engaging Child Find to assess Brayden's needs. This led to critical interventions, including surgery to remove his tonsils and adenoids and occupational therapy.

Brayden thrived at NCCHS and made remarkable progress in all areas of development. This fall, he successfully started kindergarten, armed with the tools and support NCCHS helped Joanne secure. "If it wasn't for NCCHS, I wouldn't have known how to get the help Brayden needed," Joanne shared.

Joanne's experience with NCCHS didn't just impact her grandchildren—it transformed her own life. While Brayden was enrolled, Joanne furthered her education, earning certifications in planning, scheduling, and operations management from DelTech. She also served on the Policy Council for two years, gaining valuable insight into the NCCHS's mission.

On August 14, 2024, Joanne joined NCCHS as a Family Advocate, inspired by the support she received from Grace, the advocate who helped her through her challenges. "Grace is like family to me, like a sister. She, along with the entire Head Start team, gave me inspiration to give back to others," Joanne said. Now, Joanne works alongside Grace, providing the same care and guidance she once received.

Joanne credits NCCHS for changing her life. "What NCCHS did for my grandchildren and for me was so much. I never would have expected to have this career in a million years. To go to work and be happy every day—that's everything. I am so happy to be there for the families, children, and guardians who need help—just like I did."

Team Recognitions

Service Awards



5 years: (from left to right) Dawn Wright, Natalia Valle, Waleah Chambers-Bell, Es'Shenelle Robinson, Robina Horton, and Debbie Pinkston



10 years: Eugenia Simmons



15 years: Cathy Ruhle



20 years: Christine Potter



30 years: Jeanette LaSalle

Welcome New Hires

Rosa Cabrera
Allyson Casado
Paola Cuadros
Sharon Davis
Melissa Diaz Ramos

Keyonia Laws
Amanda Reed
Emery Toler
Rylie Walker
Anthony Wright

Policy Council Members

Thank you to the many parents who have enriched our program through their service on the Policy Council, the parent governing body of NCCHS. The Policy Council collaborates closely with the Board of Directors and the Executive Director to shape policies and practices for the program.

Patrick Anselme
Jessica Clark
Ana Farias
Veronica Garcia
Anayeli Gomez
Belen Hernandez
Bakari Issa

Dorcas Johnson
Joanne Lambert
Briante Lewis
Masani Marks
Shawn Mcdougale
Eboni Morales
Brittney Olin

Maricela Popoca
Guadalupe Solano
Faith Tankersly-Greene
Diana Torres
Nakea Wright

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Wilmington, DE 19804
(302) 999-8480

Jeffrey E. Benatti

931 Corbitt Road
Bear, DE 19701
(302) 832-2212

Claymont

3301 Green Street
Claymont, DE 19703
(302) 792-9065

Early Head Start

19 Lambson Lane
New Castle, DE 19720
(302) 777-5104

Lambson

19 Lambson Lane
New Castle, DE 19720
(302) 655-5070

Manor Park

1 Bassett Avenue
New Castle, DE 19720
(302) 328-9454



Volunteer or Donate Today!

NCCHS depends on community support by way of monetary or in-kind donations and volunteers. Call the Administrative Office at (302) 452-1500 for more information on donation needs and volunteer opportunities.