



Annual Report

North Iowa Community Action Organization
Head Start

We enrich the growth and development of our children and families in
a comprehensive and educational environment

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Message from the Director

Dear Community Members,

As I reflect on my first year as the Early Childhood Director, I feel privileged to lead a program that has been dedicated to providing quality education and care for children and families for the past 60 years. This year has presented us with significant challenges, including under-enrollment and potential changes in local funding. While these decisions carry consequences, they also create opportunities for growth.

I have engaged in numerous discussions with local superintendents, principals, and other preschool providers to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of our children. The increasing demand for childcare across our counties remains a pressing concern, and we are committed to addressing this need by providing quality education for young children, particularly those aged 0-3. Additionally, we aim to support pregnant women during their pregnancies.

I trust that this annual report will be informative and enhance your understanding of the valuable services that Head Start offers to children, families, and our broader community. This report will reflect on the data, progress, and challenges we have faced in our previous school year (2024-2025). We remain dedicated to exploring collaborative opportunities within our communities to strengthen our region and provide essential services to children and families.

Sincerely,



Meghan Judisch

NICAO Early Childhood Director



Mission

NICAO Head Start’s mission is to enrich the growth and development of children and families in a comprehensive and educational environment.

NICAO Head Start Five Year Program Goals 2024-2029

Goal one

NICAO Head Start will strengthen the program foundation to enhance our ability to provide quality programming.

Progress

We have delivered training to our staff, which includes the Creative Curriculum and Behavior Incident Reports, to enhance their support. Additionally, we have refined our onboarding process to better address areas, ensuring that the needs of our new employees are fully met. Furthermore, our training has been tailored to accommodate the unique requirements of our staff based on their respective positions.

Goal two

NICAO Head Start will strengthen the quality of our monitoring and management systems.

Progress

The management team focused on establishing clear expectations regarding job responsibilities by developing procedures within the framework of existing policies.

Goal three

NICAO Head Start will identify and implement strategies to increase our effectiveness in addressing mental health needs and trauma affected children, families, and staff.

Progress

The management team conducted an analysis of data provided by the teaching staff to identify specific times of day when children exhibited challenging behaviors. As a result, we enhanced our onboarding process to incorporate training on the effective use of visual aids in the classroom and supplied staff with relevant visual materials for their use.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Head Start Administrative Office Address

218 5th St. SW. Ste. 102,
Mason City, IA 50401

Phone

(641) 494-1891

Fax

(641) 494-1894

Early Childhood Director

Meghan Judisch

Agency Website

www.nicao-online.org

Facebook Page

North Iowa Community Action Organization (NICAO)

Governing Bodies

NICAO Governing Board

NICAO Governing board has legal and fiscal responsibility for the agency programs including Head Start

Members include for 2024-2025:

Member Name	County Served	Sector
Wayne Dralle	Butler County	Public Elected Official
Tim Latham	Cerro Gordo County	Private Sector
Carl Ginapp	Cerro Gordo County	Public Elected Official
Sam Offerman	Floyd County	Private Sector
Lori Nettleton	Floyd County	Low-Income Representative
Chris Vanness	Franklin County	Public Elected Official
Jim Davies	Franklin County	Low-Income Representative
Florence Greiman	Hancock County	Public Elected Official
Erika Elbert	Hancock County	Low-Income Representative
Amber Garman	Kossuth County	Public Elected Official
Bill Carlson	Mitchell County	Private Sector
Joel Voaklander	Mitchell County	Private Sector
Linda Vaudt	Winnebago County	Low-Income Representative
Jami Kite	Winnebago County	Low-Income Representative
Donna Orton	Worth County	Private Sector

Policy Council

Policy Council is responsible for the direction of the Head Start program, including program design and operation, and long and short-term planning goals and objectives, considering the annual community wide strategic planning and needs assessment and self-assessment.

Members in 2024-2025 School Year:

Member Name	School or County Served	Member Name	School or County Served
Maura Bullons	Algona	Erika Elbert	Hancock County
Ashlee Bausman	AP	Megan Duenow	Manly
Shandy Hanson	Butler County	Jessica Baer	Manly
Jenna Heiar	Cerro Gordo	Kristy Parent	Mason City
Sandra Campbell	Charles City	Jessica Krumm	Mason City
Victoria Mead	Charles City	Gaby Young	Mason City
Stephanie Quario	Clarksville	Taylor Hovenga	Mason City
Danielle Knapp	Clear Lake	Ashley Reese	Mason City
Journey Rucker	Clear Lake	Sheri Penney	Mitchell County
Jessica Rodriguez	Floyd	Ryan Strom	Winnebago
Jim Davies	Franklin County	Paulette Webb	Worth County



Overview

NICA Head Start serves nine counties, Kossuth, Winnebago, Hancock, Worth, Cerro Gordo, Franklin, Floyd, Mitchell, and Butler County.

Last year we completed a Change in Scope as we saw a need for serving more Early Head Start students (0-3) and pregnant women. School districts and private preschools are becoming readily available in all of our service areas. We are hoping with the approval we will be able to open two new EHS classrooms in Mason City and Charles City. We currently do not have Charles City Head Start and a few Head Start classrooms open in Mason City as our Change in Scope proposal will eliminate those classrooms so that we can open the EHS classrooms.

“I couldn’t love this program more, everyone is so helpful and truly cares about the growth of my child.”—Head Start Parent

This past April, our agency was able to purchase an old childcare center in Mason City. This allowed our program to serve Early Head Start students as our current locations had many Mason City families in those locations.

Another change that has happened is our Clarksville days and hours. Clarksville School District approved going 4 days a week for their students. We surveyed families and they wanted to keep the same days as the district so that those that lived in another town were not having to go into town just for one child. The students go on Tuesday-Friday from 8:15-3:30 PM.

Site Locations

Algona Head Start
613 Diagonal Street
Algona, IA 50511

Aplington Parkersburg HS
602 Lincoln St.
Parkersburg, IA 50665

Charles City EHS
404 N Jackson St.
Charles City, IA 50616

Clarksville HS
221 N Mather St.
Clarksville, IA 50619

Clear Lake HS & EHS
1304 4th Ave. S
Clear Lake, IA 50428

Forest City Head Start
1405 West I Street
Forest City, IA 50436

Hampton HS
1405 North Federal Street
Hampton, IA 50441

Manly Head Start
209 N Broadway
Manly, IA 50456

Mason City HS and EHS
811 N Kentucky Ave.
Mason City, IA 50401

Programming Budget and Expenses

Income

NICAO Head Start utilizes funding from the federal government as well as state funding to support the mission of NICAO Head Start.

Funding for the state level is to support a Mental Health Consultant and Transportation for some of our locations. Without the assistance of state funding, we would not be able to provide these valuable resources for our children and families. Due to our loss of our Mental Health Consultant mid-year and with potential changes with the state Early Childhood Iowa funding, we elected to hold off on rehiring for this position.

Federal Funding

Fund Name	Annual Budget
Dept. of Health and Human Services/Head Start	\$ 3,427,311.00
Dept. of Health and Human Services/EHS	\$ 479,909.00
Child and Adult Care Food Program	\$ 191,895.41

State Funding

Fund Name	Annual Budget
ECI Parkersburg	\$ 19,421.00
FMC ECI *No longer receive as of July 2025	\$ 15,100.00
T4F ECI Mental Health *No longer receive as of July 2025	\$ 14,577.00
Mental Health Consultant *No longer receive as of July 2025	\$ 7,105.60
HS Transportation ECI Cerro Gordo	\$ 60,950.00
ECI CGHW *No longer receive as of July 2025	\$ 45,097.00
EHSHV	\$ 106,200.00

Expenditures

NICAO Head Start budgets in nine categories to support both direct and indirect costs, ensuring comprehensive services are provided to eligible children and families. The largest expense is salary and fringe benefits which include health insurance and IPERS for sixty staff members.

The other categories are as follows:

- Travel: This includes registration, mileage, per diem, and hotel stays for trips outside of the service area by staff and parents. Staff members travel to attend conferences and trainings related to their content area.
- Supplies: This includes office, classroom, custodial, kitchen, printing, computer, and postage supplies.
- Contractual: NICAO Head Start contracts with Forest City schools to provide transportation to our students.
- Other: Includes everything else needed to operate a quality program including health care for children, staff physicals, telephone, utilities, rent, liability insurance, bus maintenance and gasoline, staff mileage reimbursement, printing, and copy costs.
- Indirect funds: Provide human resource services, a payroll system, accounting, and reporting services and general administrative oversight.
- In addition, we receive training funds to allow us to be able to provide training to all staff and give families an opportunity to enhance their skills in curriculum, health and safety, parent engagement, mental wellness, technology, and other regulatory requirements.

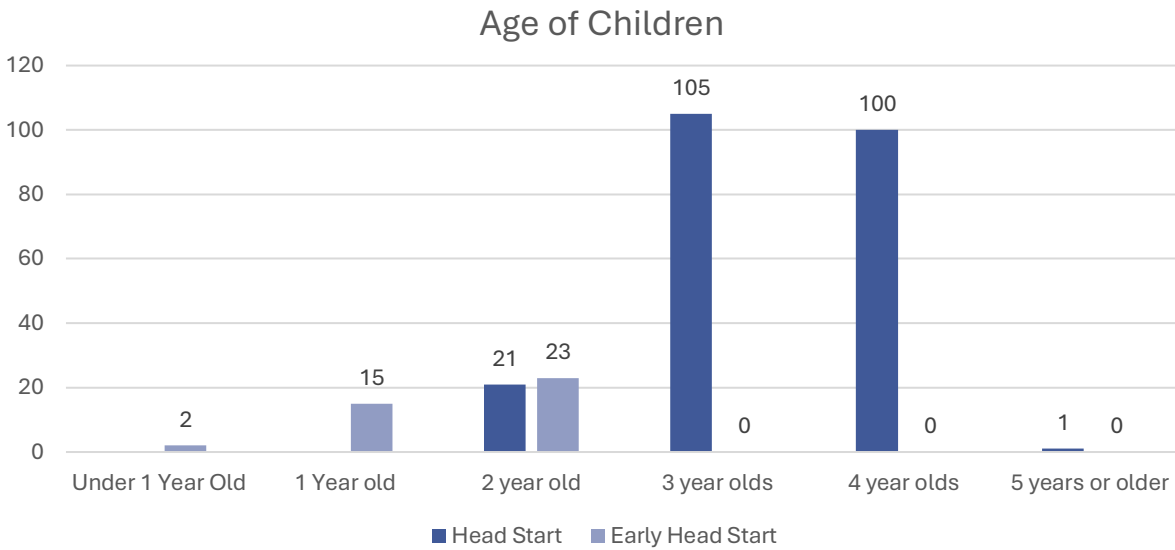
Enrollment

In 2024-2025, NICAO Head Start was funded to enroll 211 Head Start children (3–5-year-olds) and 20 Early Head Start (pregnant women and children 0-3). NICAO Head Start also served 4 Early Head Start children under state funding. Currently, we are waiting for approval of our change in scope to approve head Start to have 148 children (3–5-year-olds) and 40 EHS (pregnant women and children 0-3).

The following information is data from our Program Information Report that is submitted to Office of Head Start in August 2025.



Age of Children:



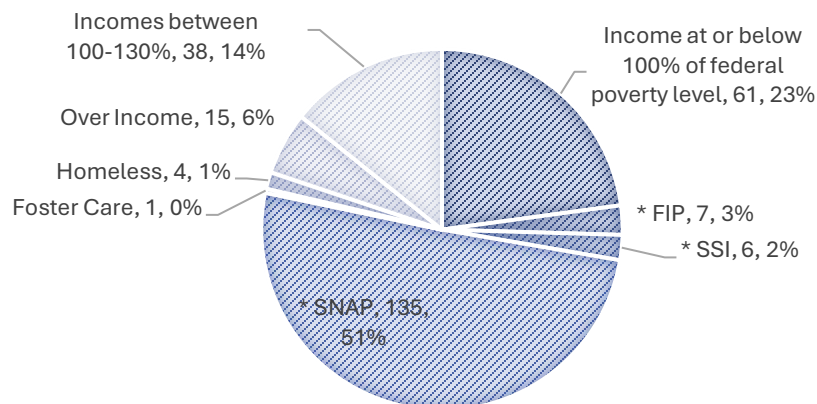
*Head Start can serve children once they turn three. They are still considered two in our counts, and we will determine eligibility during their third year in Head Start.

Total amount of children served was 211 Head Start students, and 40 Early Head Start students. Some children leave our program throughout the school year and NICAO Head Start is required to fill that vacancy within 30 days of the opening.

We served a total of 216 families between Head Start and Early Head Start.

Eligibility

PRIMARY TYPE OF DOCUMENTATION USE FOR DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

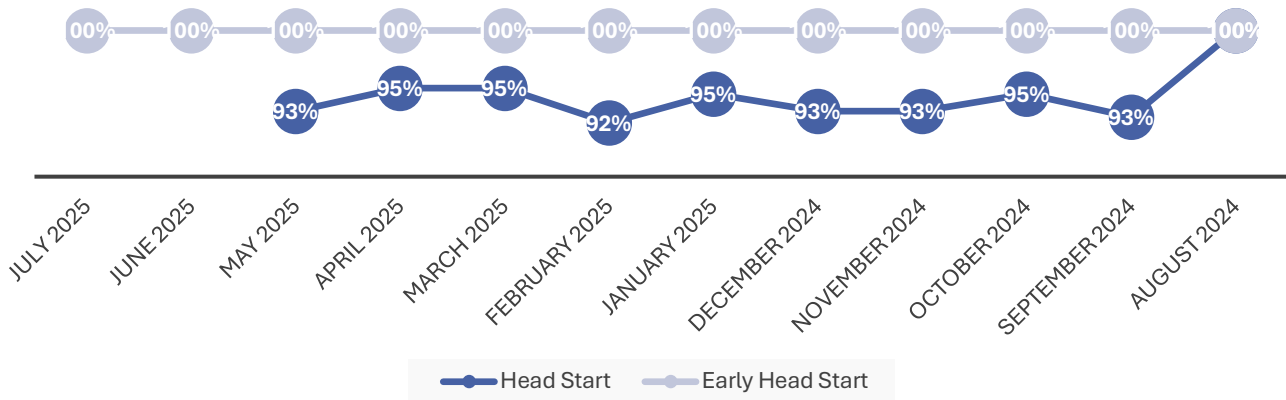


*Public Assistance (FIP, SSI, and SNAP)

Of those fifteen families that were over-income, zero were served in Early Head Start. Children who have a disability or high-risk situations are prioritized for those over income slots. Our program can only serve 10% of our funded enrollment to children whose family is over guidelines.

Enrollment

Monthly Enrollment for School Year 2024-2025



Head Start is not open in June and July. August of 2024, both Head Start and Early Head Start were fully enrolled. The main reason for under enrollment was a teacher for Charles City was not found throughout the school year. A change in scope was completed and turned into regional office in May 2025 to allow for us to serve EHS children and reduce Head Start slots so that we could reflect our needs in our communities.

Federal Review & Financial Audit

Federal Review

In 2024-2025 school year, NICAO Head Start did not have a federal review due to being in the first year of the first 5-year grant.

Audit

North Iowa Community Action Organization was audited in September 2025 for our 2023 and 2024 fiscal years. The latest audit can be found on our website at <https://nicao-online.org/reports/>

Health Services

Children’s health plays a significant role in their ability to learn. Essential health care services encompass dental care, mental health support, nutrition, and physical activities.

Oral Health

In all our classrooms, daily toothbrushing is done after a meal. Classroom staff model toothbrushing and help develop skills for children to independently brush on their own. Below you will see specific data on children attending well child exams as well as preventative oral health care for the 2024-2025 school year.

Oral Health Care	Head Start	Early Head Start
Receiving Oral Health Care	216	38
Oral Treatment Needed	41	3
Received Oral Treatment	16	0

For Head Start 19% of the children receiving Oral Health Care needed treatment. Of those 39% were able to receive treatment. Twenty-three of those children had an appointment to receive treatment after school was out.

For Early Head Start, 8% needed oral treatment and all three had a future appointment.

Well Child Care

NICAO Head Start adheres to the EPSDT recommendations for well-child checks. Children under 30 months receive more frequent well-child examinations to ensure they are developing normally and maintaining good health. Family Advocates from NICAO Head Start reach out to families to confirm that they have scheduled appointments with their medical homes and assist in overcoming barriers to attending these visits.

I think this program is absolutely amazing and I'm grateful that my son was able to attend Headstart for two years. Without the vision screenings I wouldn't have found out that he needed glasses and that had such a positive impact on his behavior once he got his prescription.

In our Early Head Start program, 100% of children received their preventative healthcare. For the Head Start program, 99% of children obtained their preventative healthcare. We did not receive two physical forms from the doctor for two children due to them being enrolled in our program for less than 30 days.

During these preventative healthcare appointments, 17% of children were diagnosed with chronic health conditions. The subsequent graphs illustrate the types of medical conditions identified.

Types of Medical Conditions	Head Start	Early Head Start
Autism Spectrum Disorder	4	1
Asthma	15	1
Seizures	2	
Life Threatening allergies	2	
Hearing Problems	11	4
Vision Problems		6
Blood lead level test with elevated lead levels > u5 g/dL	1	

Parent and Family Engagement

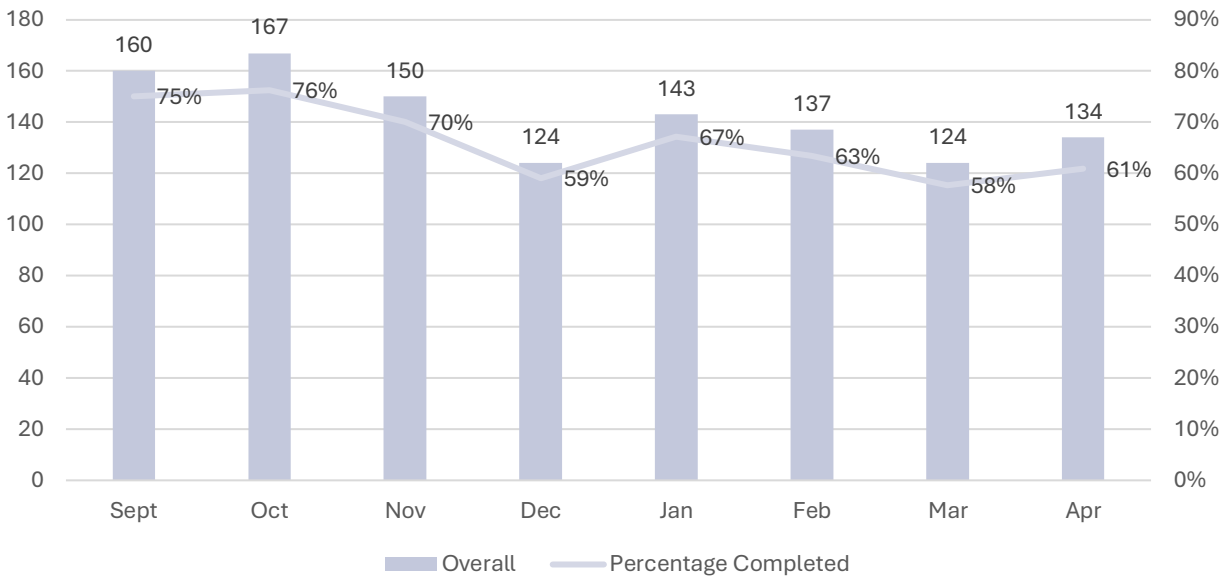
Every family is assigned a Family Advocate who provides essential support. At the start of the year, families convene with their Family Advocate to discuss strengths and areas for growth, establishing a family goal to pursue throughout the year. Collaboratively, Teachers and Family Advocates create opportunities for families to engage in their children's education. This marks the fourth year of utilizing the Nurturing Families parenting curriculum, and we have also introduced the Positive Solutions for Families program this year.

BLUE (Building Learning Understanding Engaging)

One effective method for engaging families in their child's education is by distributing a monthly BLUE (Building Learning Understanding and Engaging) activity. These activities are designed to align with our school readiness goals and are informed by the previous year's readiness reports, highlighting areas where our children require further development.

“My child has learned so much in just one school year. They’ve made lasting friendships and formed a creative and adventurous personality. My child has also found new interests and skills through Headstart. The program has made learning fun for the whole family, too, because of the blue activities, goals sheets, and end of study celebrations.”

2024-2025 Participation



Study Celebration

As a second initiative, we invite family members into our classrooms to celebrate their child's completion of a study. This provides families with the opportunity to witness their child's learning progress and engage in related activities together. A total of 73 study celebrations were conducted, either in person or through at-home activities sent home. Specifically, 34 in-person events took place in our classrooms, with a remarkable attendance of 470 families at these celebrations.

Family Enrichment Activities

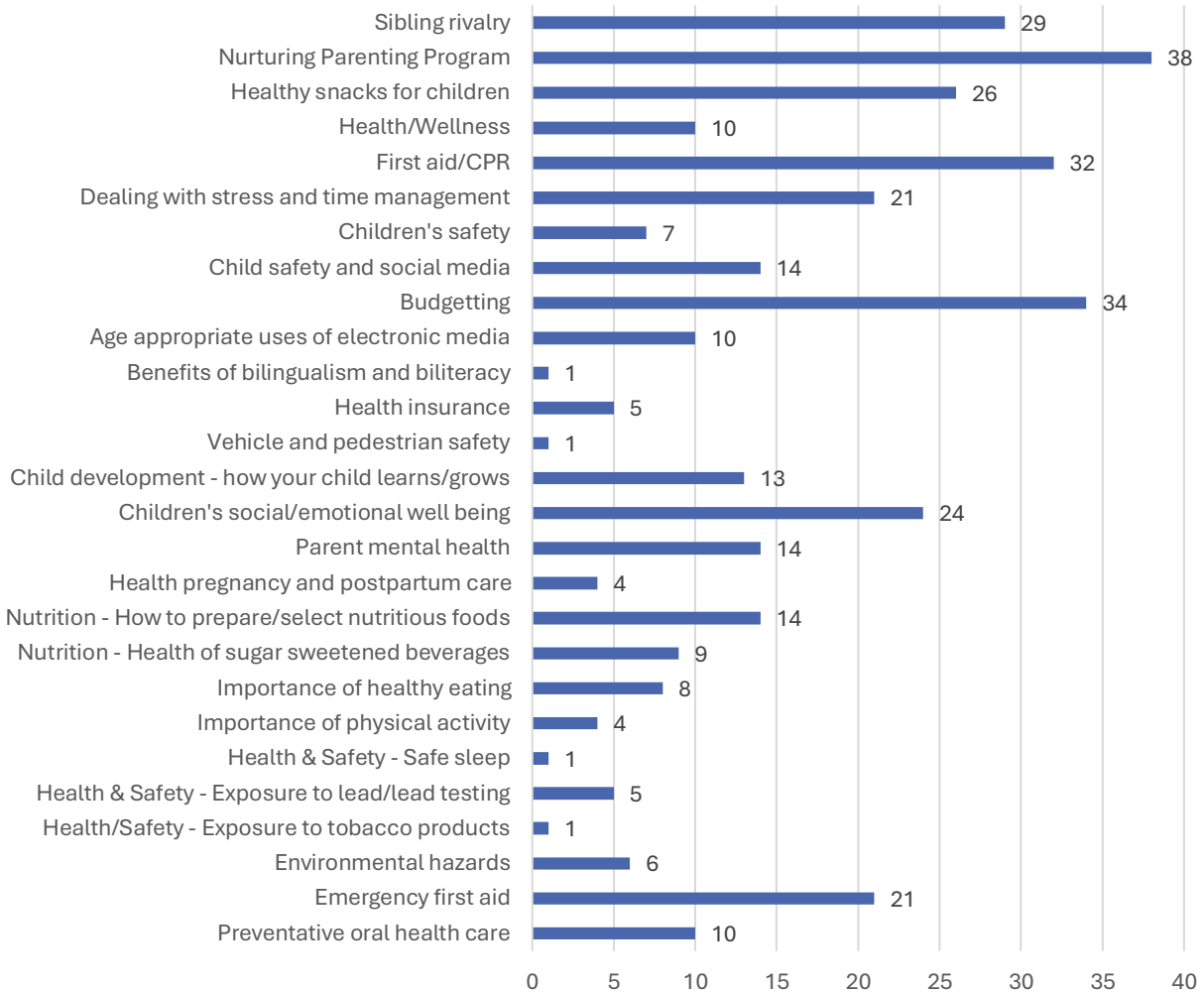
Families collaborate with teachers to establish a specific goal for their child to focus on throughout the school year. Subsequently, the Teacher distributes a family enrichment form that outlines activities designed for the family to engage in with the child. Each month, a new form is sent home to help families monitor their frequency of participation in these activities. This year marks our initial effort to track family involvement in their child's learning experiences.

188 Family Enrichment activities were turned in during the 2024-2025 school year.

Parent Education

Throughout the academic year, Family Advocates engage with families to monitor their identified goals and needs. They offer referrals, resources, and support in these areas. Notably, 63% of our families actively seek assistance from Family Advocates. The table below illustrates the resources requested by families.

Parent Education Topics



Handouts are given to families throughout the year regarding these topics.

NICAO Head Start utilized one parent curriculum this year, Nurturing Families. During the 2024-2025 school year, we had 10 families participate in the Nurturing Families sessions. These are held virtually from January to May.

We had one family complete her HSED with our support. NICAO Head Start supports families in the following ways:

“NICAO program helped not only my son, but also our family. I was able to get my GED, and it helped so much.”

The infographic consists of four light blue rectangular boxes arranged horizontally. Each box has a hexagonal icon at the top and text below. The icons are: a car for Mileage, a hand holding money for Fees, a rolled diploma for Diploma, and a person being held by two hands for Childcare.

Category	Description
Mileage	Pay for round trip mileage to attend classes
Fees	Pay for books and testing fees
Diploma	Pay for diploma fee
Childcare	Pay for a portion of childcare costs while in class

School Readiness

The school readiness goals were formulated with contributions from various school districts, including input from Principals, Teachers, and AEA staff members. These goals provide educators with clear guidance on the expected developmental milestones for children upon completing their final year of preschool. Prior to adding Early Head Start, we collaborated with Preschool Teachers, AEA staff, and School Districts to determine where children should be for them to enter preschool. In doing so, we develop Early Head Start School Readiness Goals.

Teachers utilize Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies GOLD to identify where the child is at and create an individualized plan for children to continue to make gains in their development. Teaching Strategies GOLD has checkpoints which allow teachers to communicate with families the progress the child is making. We have aligned our School Readiness goals to Teaching Strategies GOLD as well as ELOF (Early Learning Outcome Framework) and Iowa Early Learning Standards.

We love Head Start! It has helped our son learn so many new things such as writing his name, sharing, regulating his emotions etc. I also love that they pick a new topic every couple of months to learn about and even go on field trips to have a more hands on experience! His teachers are absolutely wonderful. We are so excited for next year!

Early Head Start

In 2024-2025, NICAO Early Head Start served 24 children in the fall checkpoint, 15 children in the winter checkpoint that we were able to collect data on (some of the children were new by the time winter checkpoint was due so unable to see a clear picture of those children), 23 student in the spring checkpoint, and 22 students in the summer checkpoint.

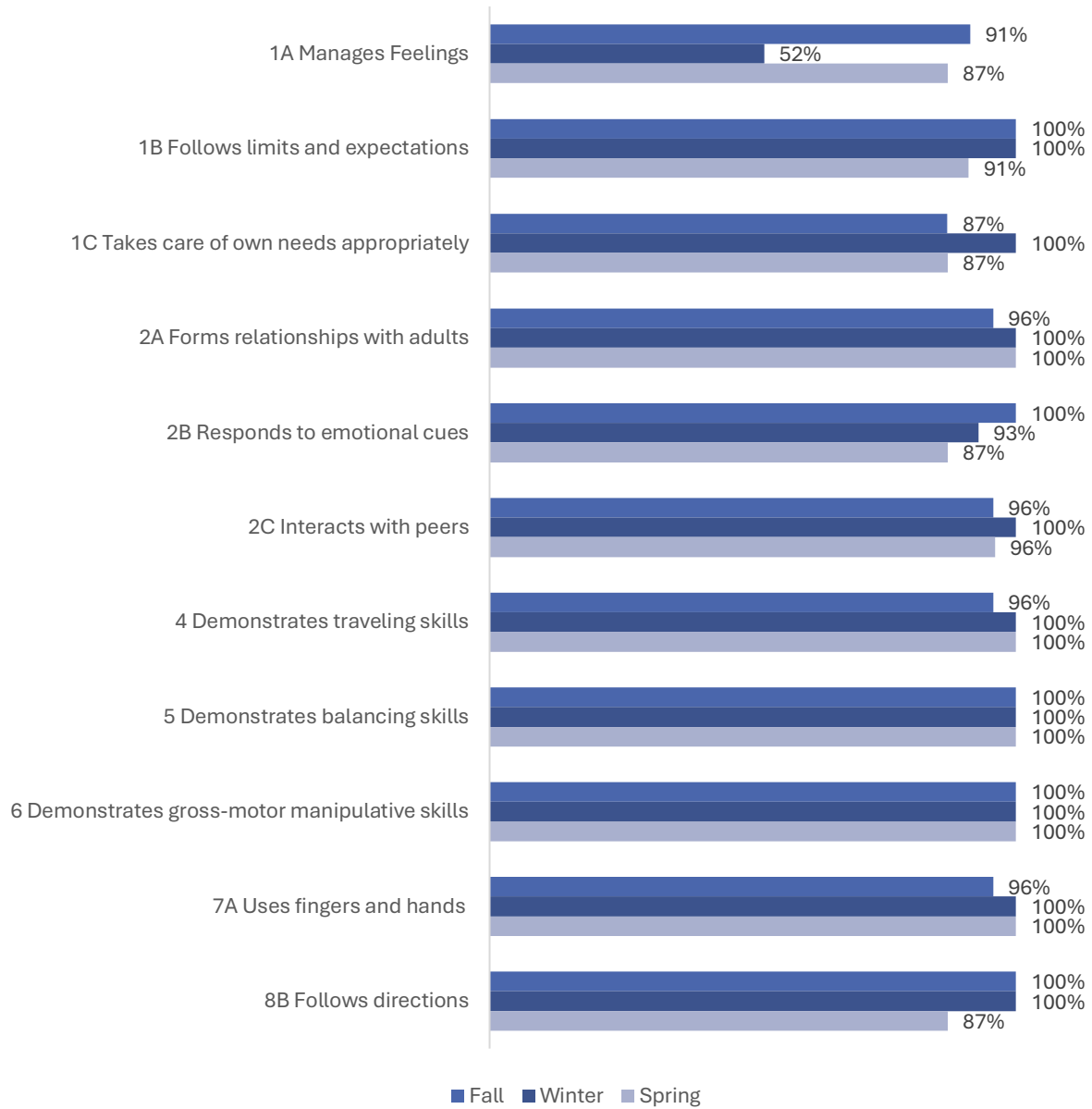
Our Early Head Start School Readiness Goals are based on age according to the color bands in Creative Curriculum GOLD. We have 22% of our children in the orange color band (1-2 years old) and 78% of the children in the yellow color band (2-3 years old). Our Early Head Start classrooms enroll eight children each. It is common for this age group to be working on social emotional and language.



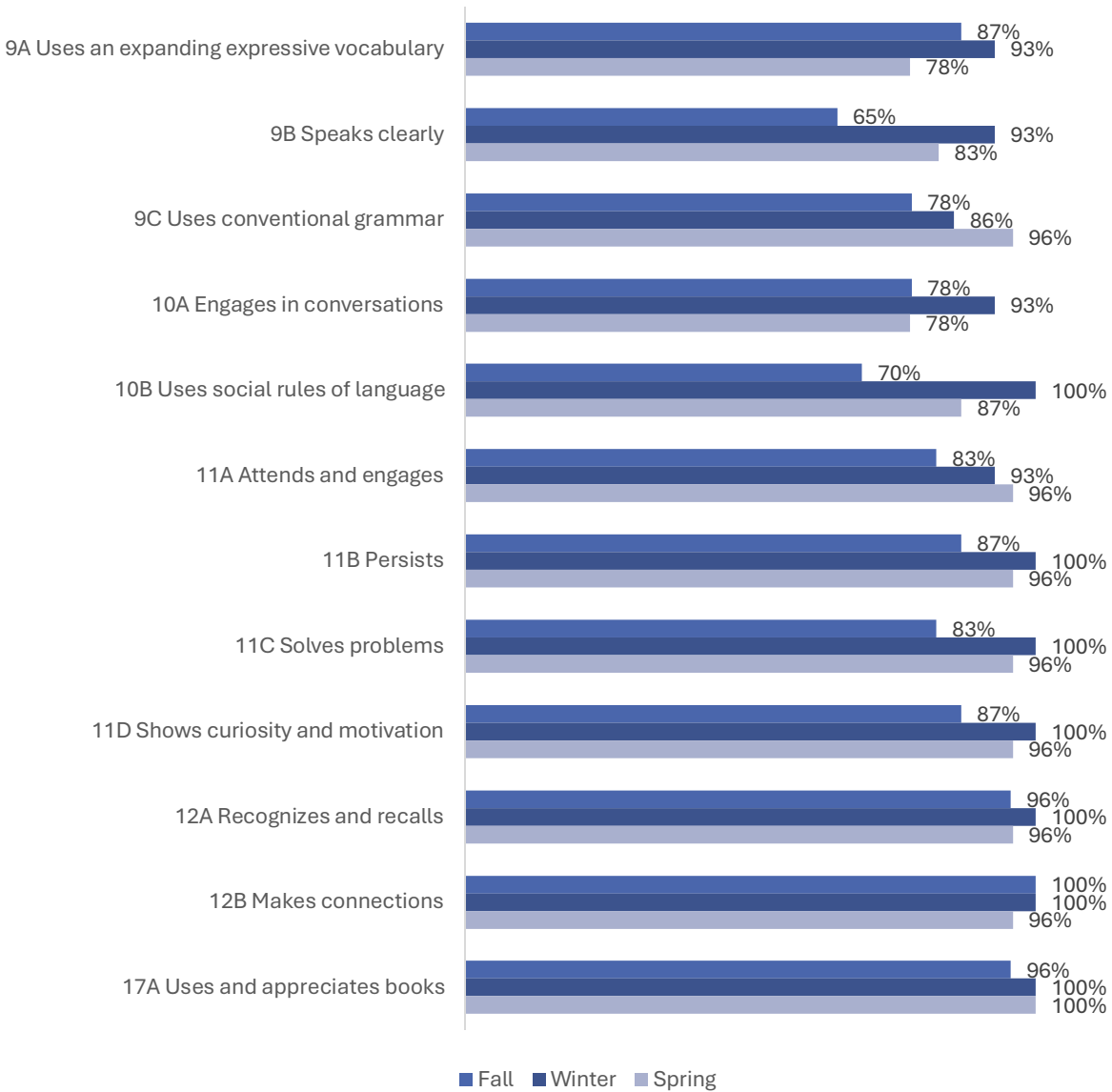
Transitioning to next program

Early Head Start students start the transition process at least 90 days prior to turning three. Teachers meet with the family to develop an individualized plan for the child. Transition activities may include, using an open cup, no longer using a pacifier, potty training, etc. The teachers and parents work on these activities. The Family Advocate assists family in applying for Head Start or another community preschool program. If a child qualifies for Head Start, the EHS teacher and HS teacher will work together in developing a transition plan between the classrooms.

EHS School Readiness Comparison



EHS School Readiness Goals Continued



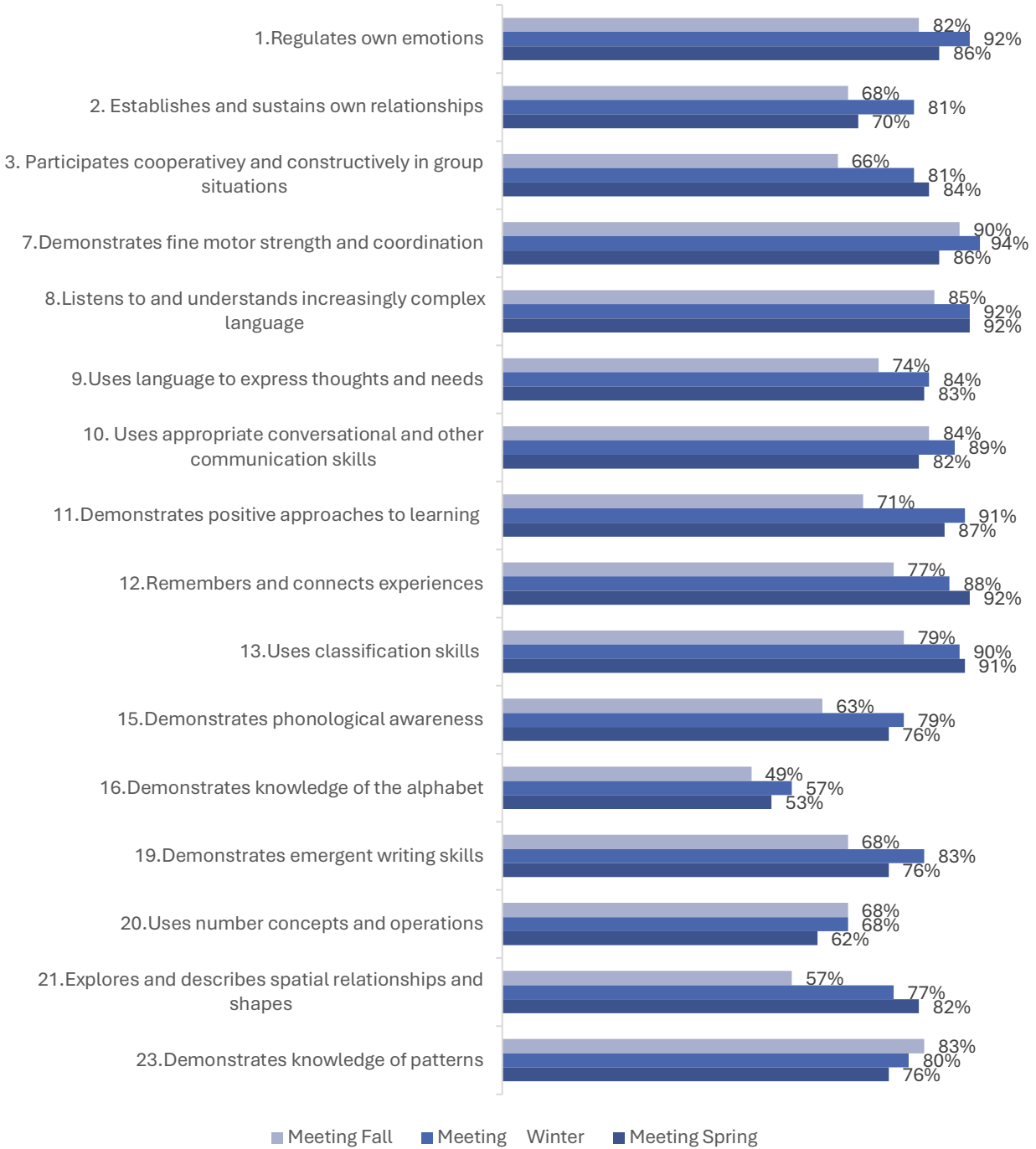
Head Start

In 2024-2025, NICAO Head Start served 200 children in the fall checkpoint, 192 children in the winter, and 195 children in the spring.

The following graph shows you in 2024-2025 school year how our children were doing in the school readiness goals. The graph below shows the comparison between Fall, Winter and Spring checkpoint for the Head Start Children and the percentage of those meeting the widely held expectations, also known as being in their color band. When looking at the graph below, you will see a lot of the objectives decreased in children being in their color band from winter to spring. The

reason for this is there were eight three-year-olds and one four-year-old that were enrolled during this checkpoint and their lack of exposure in a classroom setting.

Widely Held Expectations 3 and 4 year old



Teachers use the data throughout the school year to individualize for children and for their classroom. They meet with families to develop a child goal for the family and teacher to work on throughout the school year.

Based on the data, education team have increased the use of Beginning of Year study to set a foundation for students in learning the expectations and routine of the classroom. In August 2025, Angie Squires came to talk to classroom staff about the use of visuals and supports. In December, she came back again to talk about communicating with students to provide an enriching environment.

Kindergarten Readiness

Not only do we look at our school readiness goals to prepare students to go to Kindergarten, but we also support the family in connecting them to their local school district to attend Kindergarten round-up as well as assist with any needed information to get them set up to go to school in the fall. Teachers share data with the local school district as requested to help support placement of children in TK or Kindergarten. Teachers and Education Manager attend transition IEP meetings to help advocate for the children and family on the needs of the child when going into a new educational setting.

We went into the school year with our child being non-verbal and some bigger behavioral activities and routines in our home hard. After not even a month we noticed a big change in his speech and even some in his behavior. We had even tried speech and behavioral therapy before this and we made no progress. The staff was quick to assess his needs and make a plan on how to help him in there best of abilities with an IEP. Now at the end of the year our son is talking in almost sentences and playing alongside others with very little behavioral management. The staff changed our life completely and we are beyond thankful we are now able to do normal family activities all together, our child has made connections with more family members, and biggest of all we finally get to hear him say mom and dad.