Annual Report
FY 2025-2026

This annual report contains Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) and Head Start/Early Head Start Program information for the school year 20525-2026. The SEARP&DC Head Start school year follows each service area public school calendar, which began in August 2025 and ended in May 2026. The Early Head Start Calendar began in August 2025 and ended in June 2026.

Our Head Start Program provides services to children and families in Barbour, Covington, and Geneva Counties. The SEARP&DC Head Start Program is funded to enroll 284 Head Start children (ages 3-5) and 32 Early Head Start children (0-3). In 2022, we had to close the Headland Center for environmental issues; consequently, we were able to move the classes to other centers in the 2023-2024 school year. The Office of Head Start regulations require 90% of children to be enrolled from families that are at or below the poverty guideline. In addition, it requires that children eligible for services under IDEA must fill at least 10% of its total funded enrollment, which we reached last year. SEARP&DC's Head Start Program maintained a full enrollment of 97% and higher.

The city of Florala has no daycares in the area, and in July 2024, we were able to finally complete retrofitting the classrooms with the plumbing, electrical, and classroom furniture needed; full enrollment was reached in August 2024. We were at 100% enrollment for August 2024.

Our Head Start Program has 59 full-time employees and six part-time employees, and we have several Foster Grandparents and Senior Aides who help us in the classrooms.

Our program partnered with the Office of School Readiness to establish Pre-K classrooms in each of our Head Start centers except our Eufaula Center because the number of Pre-K students had dwindled during the 2022-2023 school year and was converted to a Head Start classroom for the 2023-2024 school year. All other Pre-K classrooms are thriving.

SEARP&DC's Head Start & Early Head Start Program Service Area Overview

County/City Where Center Operates	# of Head Start Classrooms	# of Early Head Start Classrooms	Average Student Enrollment Head Start/Early HS	# of Employees
Barbour/Eufaula	3	0	51/0	9
Covington/Andalusia	3	2	54/16	14
Covington/Florala	2	2	37/16	11
Covington/Opp	4	0	71/0	11
Geneva/Geneva	4	0	71/0	12
Henry/Headland	0	0	0/0	0
Central Office				7
Totals	16	4	284/32	64

Central Office, housed in Dothan, AL in Houston County has six (6) administrative employees, all working directly in the managing Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Pre-K program. The SEARP&DC's Head Start Program also shares in the cost of administrative, accounting, and human resources staff with other SEARP&DC programs.

Employee Fringe Benefits:

Employee fringe benefits include Blue Cross medical and dental insurance, Alabama State Employee Retirement Program, group term life insurance, and short-term disability insurance. The teaching staff are encouraged to reach the next degree in their career, and SEARP&DC helps pay for tuition and books for employees who want to further their education.

The majority of our professional teaching staff has earned college degrees in Child Development, Early Childhood Education, or Child Development Associate credentials, and some of our staff have completed their Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree with the help of SEARP&DC. One teacher has obtained his Master's degree, and three of our Head Start Central Office Staff members have the Master's degrees.

Administration and staff participate in yearly professional development during Pre-Service before school starts and Inservice during the year. DHR trainings and well-known educational consultants are brought in to enhance the pedagogy of the staff. Certificates are awarded to staff

who complete the training, which builds their professional resume and strengthens our teaching skills.

Enrollment by Financial Eligibility for 2025-2026 School Year:

Head Start Enrollment:

Based on a total enrollment of 284 children (including drop and replacement) 92% were eligible coming from families below the poverty line and public assistance recipient families. Children from foster families made up 1% of the enrollment, 1% of the families were homeless, 4 % of the children were from families exceeding the allowed family incomes between 100% and 130% of the federal poverty line.

Early Head Start Enrollment:

Based on total enrollment of 32 children (including drop and replacement) 100% were eligible coming from families below the poverty line and receiving public assistance.

Services Provided for Children & Families for School Year 25-26

Head Start Services to Children and Parents:

SEARP&DC's Head Start Program provides education, health, nutrition, mental health, disability, and social services to children and families enrolled within our program. Program Service Managers' expertise and continued monitoring of the services within each Head Start Center assures that each child and family receive the assistance the program provides. Each Center Director provides local management of the individual Head Start Centers; the Center Directors are like the principal of the center since they oversee both facilities, students, and staff. To foster communication with the families, each center has a Family Services Specialist who serves as the advocate for the families, and the staff conducts two home visits and two Parent/Teacher conferences yearly.

Education Services:

The SEARP&DC's Head Start Program utilizes *Creative Curriculum* to engage children in a comprehensive learning process for school readiness. Our program also utilizes the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) that observes and measures teacher effectiveness and interactions with children.

Observations were conducted in preschool center-based classrooms using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The CLASS tool looks at three domains and ten dimensions of teacher-child interactions and measures those observed interactions on a seven-point scale. The following results were noted:

✓ Emotional Support: 5.61 ✓ Classroom Organization: 4.76 ✓ Instructional Support: 2.97

*National Head Start 20202 Averages were as follows: Emotional Support: 6.03, Classroom Organization: 5.78, Instructional Support: 2.94

Teaching Strategies Gold is our online and ongoing child assessment tool that is used in the classroom. This comprehensive resource details the 38 objectives for development and learning—helping the teachers better understand what children know and can do, meet children where they are, and intentionally promote development and learning in ways that recognize children as individuals with different strengths, needs, and interests.

Classrooms also utilize the *Hatch* system where students log in on the computer in the classrooms and learn across seven domains of learning with a focus in math, literacy, and social-emotional development.

SEARP&DC's Head Start has established School Readiness Goals and increased our collaborative efforts with public schools, parents, and community partners. Once again, our school readiness efforts have been successful in engaging parents in supporting their children's growth in language, literacy, mathematics, science, creative arts, physical skills, and social and emotional functioning. We continue to take a holistic approach within our program that includes health, nutrition, and disability services. We also have an ongoing transition program that engages parents in supporting their child's ongoing learning and development efforts. When our children transition to kindergarten, they are equipped for additional learning and development to the best of their abilities.

Health Services:

We provide hearing, vision, and growth assessments to our children every year. We monitor the health of the children through their required yearly physicals and dental exams and follow up with any concerns the physician or parent may have. During the 2025-2026 school year, we provided dental screenings to the children. Children received follow-up treatment on an as needed basis. All children's physical is monitored by the Family Service Specialist to ensure that any medical concerns or alerts are followed by the parents and the child's health care provider. The FSS also help families who are uninsured to obtain health insurance.

Nutrition Services:

The SEARP&DC Head Start Program participates in the USDA Child Nutrition Program to provide a continuum of healthy meals for all children enrolled in our program. Children receive breakfast, lunch, and a snack during specified center operating hours. SEARP&DC Head Start receives reimbursements from USDA Child Nutrition Program.

Mental Health Services:

The SEARP&DC Head Start Program contracts with Milestones Psychology and Therapy to provide Mental Health Services to the children and parents within our Head Start Program service area. A mental health professional provides classroom observations and reports findings to the Director, Service Managers, Center Directors, and Teachers. The mental health professional also addresses specific counseling needs as they relate to the parents.

Disability Services:

SEARP&DC's Head Start Program partners with the local LEA (Local Education Agency) to identify children who may have a learning disability. The Teachers and Center Directors work together with the Disability Service Manager to identify children who need to be tested to see if they qualify for local school system services. The Office of Head Start requires that all programs have at least 10% of the students with disabilities. The 2025-2026 school year, our program identified 19 children who were diagnosed with a disability, and 50 had an IEP/IFSP during the school year. Some of the disabilities identified were speech and language impairment, hearing impairment, Autism, developmental delay, and other health impairment. It is crucial that children are diagnosed as early as possible so they can begin receiving services to equip them to move into a kindergarten class.

Parent Involvement and Policy Council:

Each Head Start Center organizes a Parent Committee that selects Policy Council Members proportioned by the number of classrooms. Our Policy Council members have a variety of responsibilities including approval of budgets, funding applications, employment, and program policies.

Parent volunteers provide local services to our SEARP&DC Head Start Centers. We encourage our parents to be involved in our Head Start Program on an on-going basis. We implemented a virtual learning platform called Ready Rosie that enabled the parents/guardian to teach and assist their child. As an important part of our School Readiness Initiative, parents are encouraged to be actively engaged in their child's learning process. Parents/guardians complete a screening tool called the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) which consists of questions in five different developmental areas. These results, along with the teachers' answers allow us to pinpoint developmental progress in children between the ages of one month to 5½ years. Evidence shows that the earlier development is assessed—the greater the chance a child has to reach his or her potential.

Community Partnerships:

Head Start cannot operate without local community support. Head Start grants require a 20% local match of federal funds. Our Head Start Program collaborates with local government agencies and school boards to receive in-kind support for facilities, utilities, and maintenance. We are thankful to the local cities and school boards that allow our centers to be housed in one of their buildings. Some of the local governments and school systems help us with utilities and maintenance needs. Without these partnerships, we would not be able to keep our doors open. Parents dedicate their time to us as volunteers on committees and the Policy Council.

The SEARP&DC Head Start Program – Past, Present and Future:

The SEARP&DC Head Start Program opened November 1974 to serve children at the Eufaula, Headland, and Opp Head Start Centers. With expansion grants, SEARP&DC's Head Start Program was able to enlarge our program to include the Geneva Head Start Center in 1991, Florala Head Start Center in 1996, and Andalusia Head Start Center in 2000.

As SEARP&DC's Head Start Program finishes its 52th year of providing educational and developmental services to children and families, we are very excited for another year of developing our children and preparing them to become school ready. School readiness is the number one priority for our program. The SEARP&DC's Head Start and Early Head Start Program will continue to approach school readiness by partnering with parents in an attempt to establish readiness goals for their children that determine how well their child is doing in the important areas of speech, physical ability, social and emotional skills, and problem-solving skills. Therefore, staff will be able to identify each child's strengths as well as determine the areas that need additional support.

SEARP&DC's Head Start and Early Head Start Program is cognizant of the needs that our program children and families face on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, we will continue to provide high quality, compassionate, and reliable services on a continuous basis to ensure that each child and family achieves success. With the increasing needs of our communities, we hope to add classrooms to our centers and eventually build state-of-the-art learning centers for our families.

Supporting Documents and Additional Information Provided Upon Request