

Minutes
Douglas-Cherokee Head Start/Early Head Start
Policy Council
February 9, 2026

Members Present

Casey Brown	Tammy Spears
Anna Uptain	Kelly Ritenour
Tamra Williamson	Jennifer Wright
Carla Testerman	Tina Patterson
Tina Layman	Emily Johnson

Members Not Present

Jennifer Jones	Kayla Murrell
Misti Eubanks	Melissa Logan
Katie Hearn	Gloria Flores

Employees Present

Kristie Woolard	Curt Amos
Aranda Pruitt	Emily Kelley
Melody Cantrell	Ginny Ritchea

Guests Present

Haley Moore

Douglas-Cherokee Head Start/Early Head Start held a virtual Policy Council Meeting on February 9, 2026, due to inclement weather cancelling the scheduled January and February meetings.

Jennifer Wright, Vice Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 11:12 AM and announced that we had a quorum.

Kristie Woolard, Parent Involvement/ERSEA/Family Community Partnership Manager, presented Mindful Moments.

Kristie announced that we are looking for a new Policy Council member to represent Early Head Start because Gloria Flores had to step down.

Jennifer asked for approval of the Policy Council minutes from December 2025. Emily Johnson, Monroe County, made the motion for approval and Anna Uptain, Blount County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Ginny Ritchea, HR Manager, presented the personnel report. The report was uploaded to the website. Jennifer asked for a motion to approve the personnel report and approve all hiring decisions. Tina Layman, Grainger County, made the motion for approval and Tammy Spears, Sevier County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Melody Cantrell, Finance Manager, discussed the budget overview. The report was uploaded to the website. Melody also discussed the need to apply for an In-Kind waiver. Jennifer asked for a motion to approve the budget report. Tina Patterson, Jefferson County, made the motion for approval and Emily Johnson, Monroe County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Training/Reports

- Discussion of Self-Assessment Policy Tool/Process: Aranda Pruitt, T/TA & Monitoring Manager
 - Looking for parent and community volunteers to visit classrooms and complete the self-assessment review form.
 - The Self-Assessment will help us find things that need improvement and plan goals.
- Training/Technical Assistance Plan: Aranda Pruitt, T/TA & Monitoring Manager
 - Our program must develop a plan for how we will spend T&TA funds.
 - This plan includes our identified goals, proposed training, and required training.
- Earned Income Tax Credit: Melody Cantrell, Finance Manager
 - Simple tax returns can be filed for free.
 - Website: EITCoutreach.org/help
- Program Goals for the New Program Year: Emily Kelley, Assistant Director
 - The program did not add any new goals.
 - We kept the same goals, made clarifications, and added a new measurable objective under goal 1.

Old Business

- None

New Business

- Curt Amos, Program Director, presented the Director's Report
 - Our program is asking for approval to apply for an In-Kind waiver in case we do not meet the required amount.
 - Low attendance continues to be a concern.
 - The program is working with the agency to take more steps to meet the Office of Head Start Program Performance Standard of achieving pay parity. Plans will be discussed in March.
 - We are asking for approval to complete the new application process for the Kiwanis Grant funds in Blount County. This grant will give money directly to the Blount County Head Start classrooms.
 - We are asking for approval to apply for an education waiver for the teacher assistant at Oak Cluster. If approved the current teacher assistant will take the teacher position, while enrolled in school toward an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education. This will allow us to then hire a new teacher assistant for the classroom. The Oak Cluster teacher position has been vacant for a while.

Jennifer asked for a motion to approve the Director's Report, In-Kind waiver, Kiwanis Grant, and teacher waiver. Tina Patterson, Jefferson County, made the motion for approval and Casey Brown, Blount County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Kristie provided County Reports from December for all counties.

Kristie presented the MVP awards for the classrooms with the most volunteer hours for December.

- Blount Maryville 4
- Cocke Newport 2
- Grainger Bean Station
- Hamblen Learning Center 5/Early Head Start 1
- Jefferson Shady Grove
- Monroe Madisonville
- Sevier Harrisburg
- Union Cross Creek

Jennifer asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Emily Johnson, Monroe County, made the motion and Tina Patterson, Jefferson County, seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:45 AM.

Casey Brown, Secretary

**Douglas-Cherokee Head Start
Policy Council Officers and Committee Members
2025-2026**

Policy Council Officers

Chairperson:

Vice Chair: Jennifer Wright

Secretary: Casey Brown

Treasurer: Misti Eubanks

Douglas-Cherokee Head Start/Early Head Start

Policy Council Members

2025-2026

Pending Approval 3-19-2026

Blount County

Casey Brown

Anna Uptain – Community Rep

Cocke County

Misty Busler

Tamra Williamson – Community Rep (3)

Grainger County

Misti Eubanks

Tina Layman – Community Rep

Hamblen County

Nestor Sanchez (FDY)

Katie Hearn

Carla Testerman – Community Rep (3)

Jefferson County

Jennifer Wright

Tina Patterson – Community Rep (3)

Monroe County

Emily Johnson

– Community Rep

Sevier County

Tammy Spears

Kelly Ritenour – Community Rep (2)

Union County

Kayla Murrell – Personnel

Melissa Logan – Community Rep (2)

**Special Session
February 23, 2026
11:00 AM**

A virtual Policy Council Special Session was called to inform the council and get approval for the following:

Head Start is one of several programs operated by Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority (the agency). The agency also receives Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funding and operates the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The agency is losing their building lease in Jefferson City and would like to lease the basement space of our Ray McElhaney Early Learning Center in Talbott. We used this space for offices in the past but due mainly to finishing the back-office space, we have not used these offices for several years.

This building is owned by Head Start and federal regulations state this is a less than arm's length transaction so the lease must be for fair market value. Based on an independent Fair Market Value (FMV) study, the valuation is \$8/sq ft. at 1290 sq ft, resulting in \$10,320 in program income annually. As the program will be receiving additional income, we must send a budget revision request to the regional office. Therefore, we need your approval for the lease and the budget revision.

Providing this space to CSBG/LIHEAP does not interfere with Head Start/Early Head Start services. The basement office has a separate entrance and there is no access to the EHS classrooms. There will be no outside interaction with head start children or staff.

Motion by: Emily Johnson, Monroe Co.

Seconded by: Anna Uptain, Blount Co.

All in favor, motion carried.

Attendees:

Katie Hearn	Kelly Ritenour
Carla Testerman	Melissa Logan
Jennifer Wright	Curt Amos
Anna Uptain	Shannon Smith
Tamra Williamson	Kristie Woolard
Tina Layman	Emily Kelley
Emily Johnson	Haley Moore

Casey Brown, Secretary



Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority, Inc.
Employee Handbook – Proposed Change 3-12-2026

Current:

SECTION 8 - BENEFITS

8.1 HOLIDAYS

- Employee's Birthday (considered paid holiday but office not closed)

Employee's birthday holiday must be taken in the same pay period as the birthday. Employees on lay-off status and who have a birthday during the layoff should schedule a time with their supervisor to take the holiday when they return from layoff.

New:

Employee's birthday holiday must be taken in the same **month** as the birthday. Employees on lay-off status and who have a birthday during the layoff should schedule a time with their supervisor to take the holiday when they return from layoff.

2026-2027 T/TA Plan Report

Of the seven goals from last year, we determined that two Education goals were overlapping; therefore, we have combined them into one goal. We will continue with six previous goals that we have either revised or added the next step in the progression of obtaining the goal for the 2026-2027 T/TA Plan.

Part 1 – Identified Goals

To help staff improve existing practices that will promote accurate administration of the developmental assessment and screenings to effectively plan classroom and home activities using Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Creative Curriculum, and Partners for Healthy Babies.

To support teaching staff in effectively implementing program goals that promote children's growth, development, and school readiness across all five developmental domains, aligned with the Head Start and Early Head Start Learning Outcomes Framework and the Tennessee Early Learning Development Standards.

To help staff increase their knowledge and understanding of the Parent, Family & Community Engagement Framework to enhance engagement practices & support professional development.

To identify children with chronic absences and provide support to increase child's attendance.

To equip staff with trauma informed behavior prevention and behavior management techniques and to enhance staff's abilities to effectively deal with behavior concerns of high-risk children (NAS, foster, high ACEs, etc.)

To increase staff awareness & knowledge to meet the required In-kind match as the program works toward the new HSPPS.

Part 2 – Head Start Training – Adjusted timelines and budget updates where

Part 3 – State Training – needed.

2025-2026 Self-Assessment/Program Improvement Plan Report

Our Self-Assessment is complete with a few questions or concerns that have been addressed, but with no major issues found. There were several nice comments about our staff and facilities as well as suggestions that we always appreciate. We had 1 Board Member, 6 Community Representatives, 40 parents/family members to volunteer their time to evaluate our program. Thank you to everyone who was able to participate in the self-assessment process. You did an awesome job!