

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

**Policy Council Officers**

Chairperson: Jennifer Jones  
Vice Chair: Jennifer Wright  
Secretary: Casey Brown  
Treasurer: Misti Eubanks

# **Douglas-Cherokee Head Start/Early Head Start**

## **Policy Council Members**

**2025-2026**

### **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)

**Minutes**  
**Douglas-Cherokee Head Start/Early Head Start**  
**Policy Council**  
**March 19, 2026**

Members Present

Casey Brown	Carla Testerman
Anna Uptain	Tina Patterson
Misty Busler	Emily Johnson
Tamra Williamson	Tammy Spears
Misti Eubanks	Kelly Ritenour
Tina Layman	Melissa Logan
Katie Hearn	

Members Not Present

Jennifer Wright  
Kayla Murrell

Employes Present

Kristie Woolard	Melody Cantrell
Amber Brobeck	Ginny Ritchea
Emily Kelley	Curt Amos

Guests Present

Rene Tabor  
Haley Moore

Douglas-Cherokee Head Start/Early Head Start held a Policy Council Meeting on March 19, 2026, at Shoney's, located at 120 Sharon Dr. Dandridge, TN 37725.

Kristie Woolard, Parent Involvement/ERSEA/Family Community Partnership Manager, called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM and announced that we had a quorum. Kristie also announced that the current Policy Council Chair and Vice Chair had to resign. She called for an election to replace the Chair and Vice Chair. Katie Hearn, parent from Hamblen County, volunteered to be elected as the new Chair. Tammy Spears, parent from Sevier County, volunteered to be elected as Vice Chair. No one was nominated. Kristie asked for a motion to approve the new Policy Council Chair and Vice Chair. Melissa Logan, Union County, made the motion for approval and Tamra Williamson, Cocke County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Emily Kelley, Assistant Director, provided the Literacy reading with the book, *A Hat for House* by Audrey Perrott.

Anna Mendoza, DCEA Housing Director, presented the DCEA Program Spotlight. She shared information about the Affordable Housing Program. Affordable Housing rent is based on

income, and most have age requirements. For more information call: 423-586-1494 or visit [www.dcea-affordablehouseing.org](http://www.dcea-affordablehouseing.org).

Katie Hearn, Chair, called for approval of the new Policy Council members, Misty Busler and Nestor Sanchez. Misty is a current Head Start parent from Cocke County. Nestor is a current Early Head Start parent from Hamblen County. Tina Patterson, Jefferson County, made the motion for approval and Tammy Spears, Sevier County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Katie asked for approval of the Policy Council minutes from February 2026. Misti Eubanks, Grainger County, made the motion for approval and Kelly Ritnour, Sevier County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

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

Melody Cantrell, Finance Manager, discussed the budget overview. The report was uploaded to the website. Katie asked for a motion to approve the budget report. Tammy Spears, Sevier County, made the motion for approval and Misti Eubanks, Grainger County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Carla Testerman, EFNEP Program Assistant II, from the UT Extension Hamblen County presented the Community Spotlight. Carla explained that the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program provides educational training for adults and children in grades 3-12 on healthy eating, cooking, how to read food nutrition labels, and more. For more information email [ctesterm@utk.edu](mailto:ctesterm@utk.edu) or visit [extension.tennessee.edu/Hamblen](http://extension.tennessee.edu/Hamblen).

#### Training/Reports

- Early Childhood/TSG Updates: Amber Brobeck, Curriculum and Assessment Manager
  - All CLASS observations have been completed except for two classrooms.
  - There was a TSG training in March for all new teachers.
- Outcomes Report: Amber Brobeck, Curriculum and Assessment Manager
  - There were 11 classrooms that had not completed the TSG checkpoint due to weather closures and delays.
  - Current Head Start results show improvement in all 6 measurable areas with cognitive having the highest gains.
  - The Early Head Start checkpoint was completed by all classrooms.
  - Math had the highest increase, cognitive and literacy had decreased.
  - All results show that children are progressing with the School Readiness Goals.
- Agency Audit: Haley Moore, DCEA Assistant Fiscal Officer
  - An audit was conducted and there were no non-compliances found.

#### Old Business

- None

#### New Business

- Agency Policy Update: Ginny Ritchea, HR Manager
  - The Agency made the Birthday Holiday for employees available to take in the month of their birthday instead of in the pay period in which their birthday falls.

Katie asked for approval of the new DCEA Agency policy change. Emily Johnson, Monroe County, made the motion for approval and Casey Brown, Blount County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

- Grant Application and Supporting Documentation: Curt Amos, Program Director
  - The instructions for what must be included in the grant application have been greatly reduced.
  - Curt completed a brief narrative which includes proposed changes in the next program year.
  - Melody completed the finance section.
  - The Self-Assessment was completed but is no longer required to be submitted with the grant.
  - The Self-Assessment report shows no major issues. The assessment has been uploaded to the website.
  - The T/TA Fund Plans were made available to all Policy Council members. The plan has three sections: Identified goals, mandated/required training by Head Start, and required training by DHS.
  - Melody Cantrell discussed the grant budget that will be submitted.
    - Head Start budget decreased a little because there are less classrooms.
    - Early Head Start increased a little because there are more classrooms.
    - Uploaded Items for the Grant:
      - Narrative
      - Cost Allocation Plan
      - HS/EHS Budget Justification
      - Indirect Cost Agreement
      - Grant Salaries
- Curt Amos, Program Director, presented the Director's Report
  - The grant is due on April 1.
  - The Health and Mental Health Services Advisory Committee Meeting will take place April 7.
  - Emily Kelley, Assistant Director, discussed the Head Start policy changes for Substance Abuse and Diapering.

Katie asked for approval of the new Head Start Substance Abuse and Diapering policy changes. Misti Eubanks, Grainger County, made the motion for approval and Casey Brown, Blount County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

- Curt presented the proposed program changes for the next program year.
  - The program plans to eliminate all PBSA and CCA positions in the Head Start program.
  - The program plans to create a new position called Special Service Assistance (SSA) in every classroom.
  - The SSAs will have specialized training to work with children with behaviors.
  - The program plans to revise the leave earned by Head Start staff.
    - HS staff will receive 2 personal days a calendar year.
    - Fall, Winter, and Spring Break will now be paid time off.
    - HS staff will receive 5 paid weather days.
    - Sick Leave accrual will remain unchanged.

Katie asked for a motion to approve the Director's Report, submission of the grant, and the proposed program changes. Casey Brown, Blount County, made the motion for approval and Emily Johnson, Monroe County, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Kristie provided County Reports for all counties.

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

- Blount           Maryville 5
- Cocke           Newport 2
- Grainger        Central Point
- Hamblen        Learning Center 2/Early Head Start 4
- Jefferson       White Pine
- Monroe         Madisonville
- Sevier          Oak Cluster
- Union          Maynardville

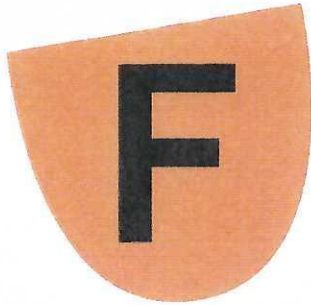
Kaite asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Melissa Logan, Union County, made the motion and Misti Eubanks, Grainger County, seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 12:35 PM.

---

Casey Brown, Secretary

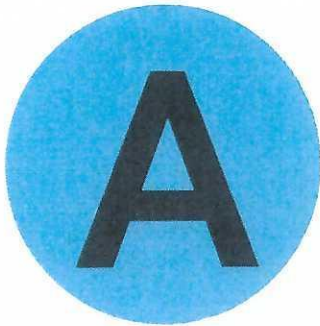
# Free and appropriate public education (FAPE)

Here's what this important legal right means for students who need help in school.



## **is for free.**

Free means the government pays for the education of students with disabilities. There's no cost to families. However, families do have to pay the same extra school fees — for example, sports and club fees — that all students pay.



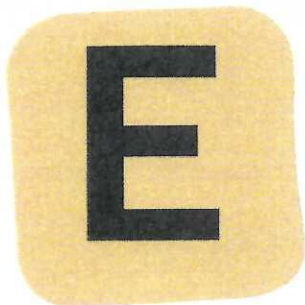
## **is for appropriate.**

Appropriate means that kids who qualify get an Individualized Education Program (IEP) with services to meet their unique needs. Others may get a 504 plan that gives equal access to learning.



## **is for public.**

Public means supervised by the public school. An IEP team — teachers, parents, and others — decides what services and support the student gets. In a few cases, the government may pay for kids with disabilities to attend private school.



## **is for education.**

Education can include special education. It can also include related services, like speech therapy, counseling, or even transportation. The goal is for kids to make progress in school and be prepared for the future.

# IDEA / Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

## IDEA is...

A federal education law. Kids with disabilities who qualify can get special education and related services from public schools.

## IDEA covers...

Kids from birth through high school (or age 21). But a child must have a disability in one of 13 categories in the law **and** need special education to make progress in school. Not all kids who struggle in school will qualify.

## IDEA gives families rights, too

## IDEA requires public schools to...

Find and evaluate kids with disabilities — at no cost to families. Kids have the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is tailored to a child's unique needs and may include the following:



### Special education

Instruction designed to meet the child's individual differences and needs

Example: explicit reading instruction



### Related services

Services that help the child benefit from special education

Examples: speech and occupational therapy



### Accommodations

Changes in the classroom to how the child learns the curriculum

Examples: extra time on tests, seating at the front of the class



### Assistive technology

Tools that help the child work around barriers to learning

Examples: calculators, keyboards, graphic organizers

Parents and guardians have the right to be part of the team that develops the IEP. They have the right to disagree with the school and ask for due process, a formal way to resolve disputes.