HEAD START®

A Program of New River Community Action

Printed copies of New River Community Action, Head Start program's Annual Report are distributed to partner organizations and made available at Head Start sites. It is also available electronically on our website at https://newrivercommunityaction.org/

Annual Report

2025-2026

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A Message to the Community

Dear Community,

It is my pleasure to share the New River Community Action Head Start Annual Report. This report celebrates the children, families, staff, and community partners who make our Head Start program possible and highlights the meaningful work accomplished during the 2025–2026 school year.

This year, New River Community Action Head Start proudly served 253 families across the New River Valley. Our program includes 17 classrooms in seven Head Start facilities, along with four blended sites located in local elementary schools. Through these settings, we provide children and families with comprehensive services designed to support learning, health, development, and family well-being.

Head Start is more than a preschool program. It is a comprehensive approach that recognizes the importance of supporting the whole child and the whole family. Our services promote social-emotional development, early learning, healthy development, nutrition, and school readiness while connecting families with health, medical, dental, and other community resources.

We also recognize and celebrate the vital role of parents. As a child's first and most important teacher and advocate, parents are essential partners in their child's success. Through strong home-school partnerships, we work together to strengthen families, build positive parent-child relationships, and help children develop the skills they need to enter kindergarten prepared to learn and grow.

Since its beginning in 1965, Head Start has served nearly 25 million preschool-aged children throughout the United States, helping generations of children and families build stronger foundations for the future. Locally we have served over 20,000 children and their families.

I am deeply grateful to our Head Start families, staff, administrators, NRCA Board of Directors, Head Start Policy Council, and community partners. Your dedication and collaboration are at the heart of our success. Together, we are creating opportunities, strengthening families, and helping children across the New River Valley begin their educational journey with confidence.

Thank you for your continued support of New River Community Action Head Start and the children and families we proudly serve.

Sincerely,

Veronica Fitch

Director of Early Childhood & Family Services

Pre-school is one of the biggest adventures of a child's life!

Eligibility and Enrollment

Head Start gives children from at-risk backgrounds the skills they need to be successful in school and life. Head Start has been in operation for over 60 years and has served more than 35 million children across the country. Locally the NRCA Head Start Program supported 253 children and families in 2025-2026 on their path to success.

Qualifying Categories	Number of Families
Income at or Below 100% of Federal Poverty Line	28
Public Assistance	159
• TANF	3
• SSI	8
• SNAP	116
Foster Care	3
Homeless	29
Eligibility based on other types of need	22
Income between 100% and 130% of the Federal Poverty Line	12

Household Language	
English	226
Spanish	8
Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali	9
Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog	2
German, French, Italian, Croatian, Yiddish, Portuguese, Russian	1
Swahili, Wolof	
Other	7
Unspecified	

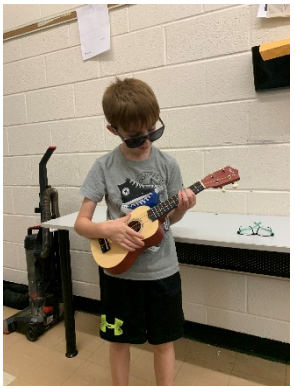
Race & Ethnicity		
	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	
Asian		5
Black/African American	1	28
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	
White	12	158
Bi-Racial/Multi-Racial	6	23
Other: Families chose not to complete	17	

Our Commitment to Quality Outcomes

NRCA Head Start provides high-quality early childhood education for children ages three to five. Facilities are licensed by the Virginia Department of Education and staffed with early childhood professionals.

Our program uses a developmentally appropriate educational approach that is grounded in accepted theories of how children grow and learn. Teachers create environments and offer experiences that build upon children's interests, support their abilities and needs, include a range of adult-directed and child-initiated learning, and encourage children to work and explore independently. Our classrooms are inclusive of children with disabilities and respectful of differences in gender, culture, language, ethnicity, and family composition.

Our centers used the STREAMin3 Curriculum for preschool during the 2025-2026 program year. This high-quality and research-based curriculum promotes measurable progress towards children's development. The content and learning outcomes of the curriculum align with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and Virginia's Early Learning & Development Standards. Standards are organized under the following developmental domains:



Approaches to Learning

Language & Literacy

Cognitive

Math

Science & Reasoning

Perceptual, Motor & Physical

NRCA Head Start goals are aligned with the Virginia Department of Education goals to promote self-regulation, literacy, and math to ensure preschool students are kindergarten ready.

School Readiness Outcomes

NRCA Head Start uses the STREAMin3 Developmental Progressions to measure child progress. This assessment tool is aligned with the Virginia's Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF). Our program is committed to generating positive outcomes for children and families, and we believe that efficient management systems and strategic use of data are essential to this effort.

(Numbers reflect the percentage of children meeting or exceeding learning standards for their age group)

Relate (Social/Emotional)			
Program Year	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
2024-2025	21%	43%	83%
2025-2026	52%	62%	85%
2026-2027			
2027-2028			
2028-2029			

Regulate (Approaches to Learning)			
Program Year	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
2024-2025	22%	39%	83%
2025-2026	55%	61%	83%
2026-2027			
2027-2028			
2028-2029			

Move (Perceptual/Motor/Physical)			
Program Year	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
2024-2025	22%	47%	92%
2025-2026	65%	62%	87%
2026-2027			
2027-2028			
2028-2029			

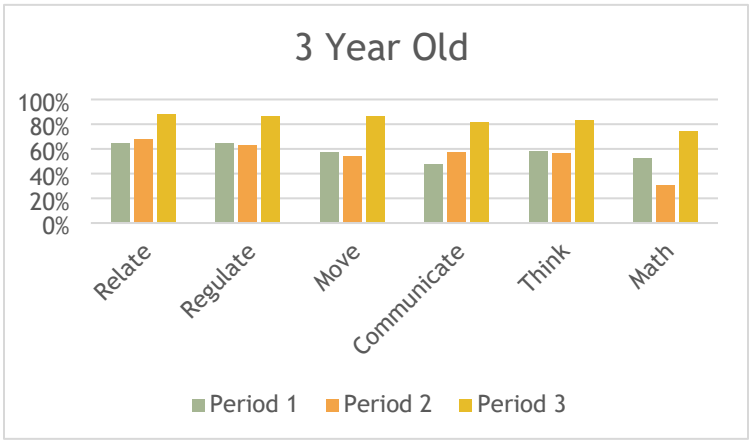
Communicate (Language/Literacy)			
Program Year	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
2024-2025	22%	47%	84%
2025-2026	50%	57%	80%
2026-2027			
2027-2028			
2028-2029			

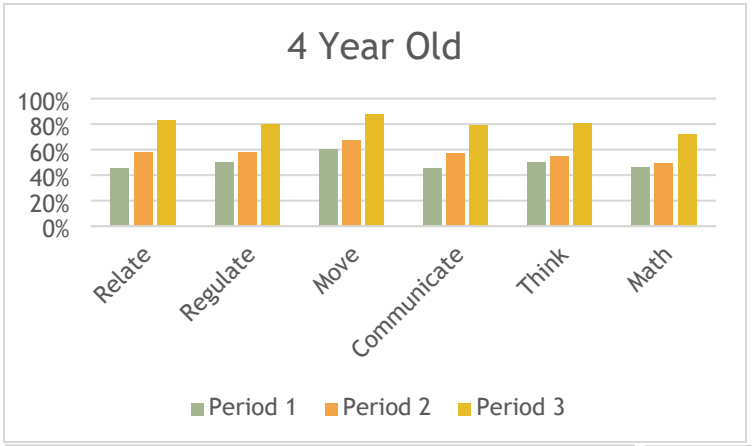
Think (Cognition/Reasoning)			
Program Year	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
2024-2025	17%	34%	84%
2025-2026	53%	56%	82%
2026-2027			
2027-2028			
2028-2029			

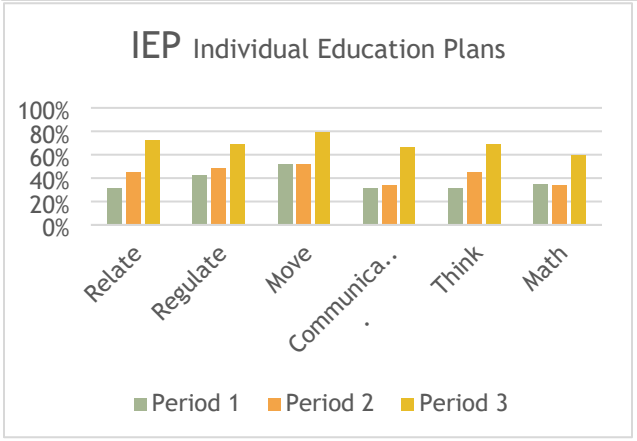
Math (Cognition)			
Program Year	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
2024-2025	12%	35%	87%
2025-2026	48%	42%	73%
2026-2027			
2027-2028			
2028-2029			

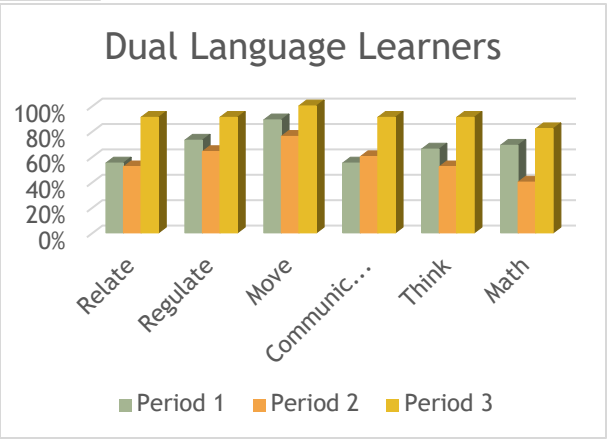
Children enrolled in NRCA Head Start consistently meet our program benchmark goal. Approximately 80-90% of enrolled children meet or exceed early childhood learning standards for their age group. This trend has been consistent since 2019.

2025-2026 School Readiness Outcomes by Subgroups









(Numbers reflect the percentage of children meeting or exceeding learning standards for their age group.)

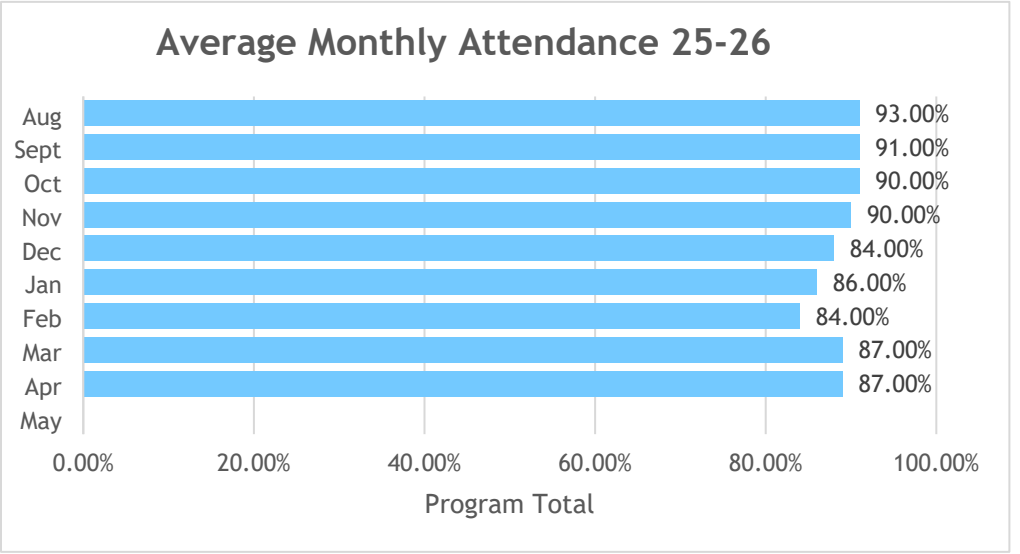
NRCA Head Start analyzes student outcomes at least three times per year for individual children, classroom-by-classroom, and program-wide. Additionally, we analyze data by sub-groups to ensure we are meeting the needs of all children in our program.

School Attendance

Family Wellness Coaches monitor daily attendance and collaborate with families to identify and address barriers to consistent school attendance, while supporting the development of sustainable habits that promote student success.

The routines developed in preschool continue throughout school. Missing even 1 or 2 days every few weeks can make it harder to:

- Gain early reading and math skills.
- Build peer relationships.
- Develop good attendance habits.

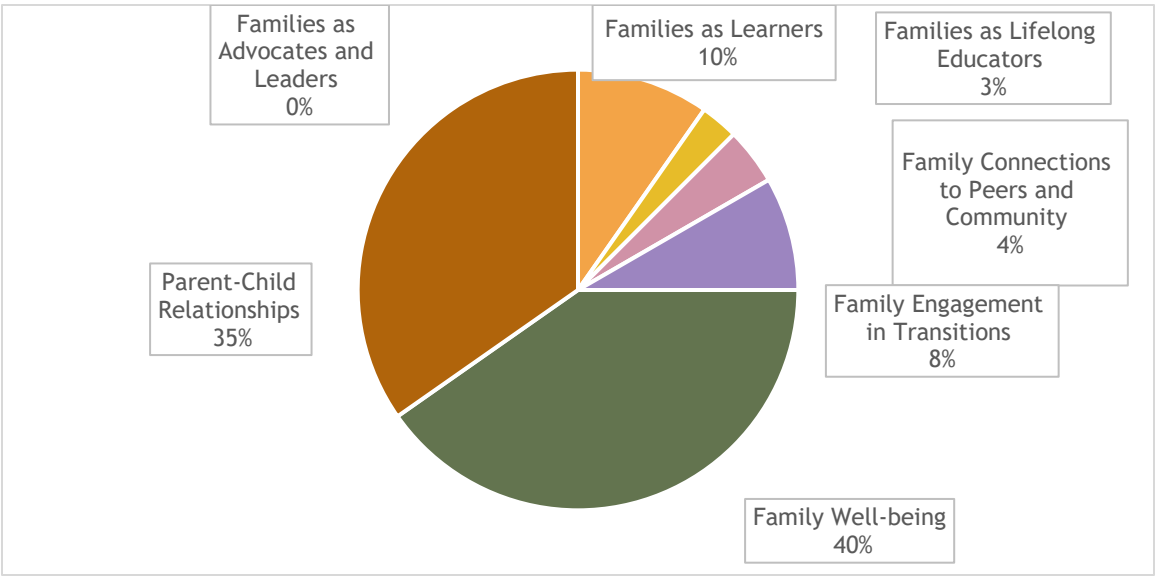


Research shows that one-third of chronically absent (missing 10% or more of the school year) 4-year-old children continue to be chronically absent in kindergarten. Of those students, more than 30% are still chronically absent in second grade.

Parent, Family Outcomes

Through the collaborative and strengths-based family partnership process the staff partner with each family to identify their goals and connect them with services and resources that match their goals, interests, and needs. In the 2025-2026 program year, NRCA helped families establish 279 goals, primarily focused on parent-child relationships and family well-being.

Family Outcomes are tracked and analyzed using the Head Start Parent Family Community Engagement Framework.



(a) *Family partnership process*. A program must implement a family partnership process that includes a family partnership agreement and the activities described in this section to **support family well-being, including family safety, health, and economic stability, to support child learning and development,** to provide, if applicable, services and supports for children with disabilities, and to foster parental confidence and skills that promote the early learning and development of their children. The process must be initiated as early in the program year as possible and continue for as long as the family participates in the program, based on parent interest and need.

Parent, Family Outcomes continued…

Parents are encouraged and supported as their child's first and most influential teacher. Children whose parents or guardians engage in their education are more likely to:

- Get Higher Grades & Test Scores
- Have Better Attendance
- Feel Positive about School

The classroom curriculum and home learning activities and goals are developed from individual child developmental assessment data, the interests, and ideas of the children, and with family input. The curriculum provides ways to create nurturing practices, interactions, and environments that foster trust and emotional security within the learning activities. It helps families to actively engage in their child's education.

Number of Families that received the following program services or referrals to promote family outcomes:

Services or Referral Area	Number of Families
Emergency/Crisis Intervention	94
Housing Assistance	7
Asset Building Services	5
Mental Health Services	78
Substance Misuse Prevention	28
English as a Second Language (ESL) training	3
Assistance in enrolling in an education or job training program	9
Research-based parenting curriculum	107
Involvement in discussing their child's screenings/assessment results and their child's progress	253
Supporting transitions between programs	212
Education on preventive medical and oral health	231
Education on health and developmental consequences of tobacco product use	177
Education on nutrition	253
Education on postpartum care	3
Education on relationships/marriage	8
Number of families that were counted in at least one of the services above.	253

Health, Mental Health & Disabilities Services Outcomes

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL HEALTH IS ESSENTIAL FOR THEIR READINESS TO LEARN.

Family Wellness Coaches work with families to ensure access to ongoing healthcare services, promote healthy routines, encourage physical activity and emphasize good oral health practices.

At the end of our enrollment year for 2025-2026:

- 253 (100% of families) were reported to have an ongoing source of continuous and accessible healthcare.
- 212 (92%) were reported to have access to dental care.
- 32 children received medical treatment for vision problems.
- 214 (94%) children were reported as up to date on all immunizations appropriate for their age.
- 96 NRCA Head Start children were enrolled in case management services.
- 46 children had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

Nutrition and Food Services

NRCA Head Start served a total of 44,414 meals and snacks to the children during the program year.

Our agency was reimbursed $151,214.81 by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA CACFP) for all meals provided to children. According to our policies and USDA Parent Survey responses, no family ever had to provide food or money for any meals while their child was in our care.

VIRGINIA CACFP Child and Adult Care Food Program

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Financials and Revenue

Department of Health & Human Services	$	3,687,504.00
United States Department of Agriculture	$	151,214.81
Foundations	$	2,400.00
Local Government/CSBG	$	61,902.61
Contributions	$	2,959.65
United Way	$	0.00
In-Kind Donations	$	1,092,053.47
Misc.	$	
Commonwealth of VA (Artists in Education Grant)	$	1,506.00
Total Revenue	$	4,999,504.54

Head Start Policy Council

NRCA Head Start offers childcare compensation and services for parents interested in Policy Council. We want them to be active members in our program's decision-making process.

2025-2026 Members

Sarah Popczun - Chair
Vonetta Williams – Vice Chair
Jennifer Brown – Secretary & Board Liaison
Stephanie Smith – Community Rep
Paige Walters
Alisha Persinger
Nick Popczun
Annie Shaba
Scott Sowder

Health & Mental Health Advisory Committee

Our Health & Mental Health Advisory Committee met twice during the 2025-2026 program year as a virtual meeting. The committee members were instrumental in developing health, safety, and emergency related policies and procedures. In accordance with the Head Start Performance Standards, a new member was added representing mental health. That member is from New River Valley Community Services. Our other members represent the Community Health Center of the NRV (child dental), the Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM), the New River Health District's (NRHD) Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, and the NRHD immunization specialist, our agency's Children's Health Improvement Partnership coordinator, the Virginia Poverty Law Center's New River Valley health insurance navigator, and an Emeritus Faculty of the Radford University's College of Nursing.

Our members are Maggie Bassett, Suzanne Belcher, Patty Hall, Debbie Poff, Rhonda Seltz, Neely Russell, Stephanie Smith, and Theresa McCann.

We are so appreciative of the experience and resources these committee members have provided to our program. Thanks so much!

2025-2026 NRCA Board of Directors

Laura Walters
Chair

Kelly Patton
Vice-Chair

Albert Brogan
Secretary/Treasurer

BOARD MEMBERS

Laura Walters – Chair

Kelly Patton – *Vice Chair*

Albert Brogan – Secretary/Treasurer

Sheila Blake

Kathryn Blauth

Jennifer Brown

Sebrina Davidson-Ratcliffe

Melissa Dodson

Shelly Farmer

Jenny Riffe

Samantha Sparks

Alexandria Strickler

Jason Tolkaz

Corbin Vierling

Dr. Boyoung Park ex-*officio*

The New River Community Action Board of Directors provides oversight of the Head Start program. Meetings are held monthly and are open to the public.

Parent Testimonials and Shout-Outs 25-26

“Hannah, LeAnn, Melody, Crystal, Kathryn & Felicia are all phenomenal. Highly recommend all of them.”

“I would like to say that all the staff at the Early Learning Center at NRCC are the best! They are caring, concerned, and kind to everyone and are never too busy to help.”

“I appreciate the kindness, patience, and communication from the Head Start Staff at McHarg Elementary School.”

”Ms. Lane & Lori have been wonderful.”

“Ms. Lindsey is amazing – Harmani talks about her constantly and she is always kind and helpful.”

“Thanks Ashley & Brandy for making her school life start off great!”

“Love Ms. Faith & Ms. Alison. Always keeping the show on the road.”

“They are amazing. They are always willing to help, caring – always there - when I leave my child I know he is in good hands.”

“Lisa, Faith, April and Joan have been amazing at communicating with me and always show support!”

“Previous and current staff at Blacksburg HS really appreciated.”

Parent Testimonials and Shout-Outs 25-26 continued…

"Robin, Katrina, Christy were all amazing!"

"Mason really loved Ms. Brittany."

"Ms. Christi & Ms. Katrina have made my son with special needs come so far!!"

"All of the staff at Pearisburg HS are kind, knowledgeable and respectful. All three of my children have attended and had wonderful experiences."

"Thank you all for all the love and support."

"Robin & Jessica from Pearisburg are heaven sent and some of the best people I know."

"I feel the teachers and staff at the Christiansburg HS truly care about their students. 10 out of 10."

" Ms. Paige & Ms. Holly – y'all are great, I appreciate everything you have done to help Jazmine and me. We will miss y'all! Thank you."

"Had great experiences with all staff!"

Community Partners

Strong community partners are essential to the success of our program. We have blended classrooms where Head Start and **Virginia Preschool Initiative** students learn together within four out of five local school systems. While we cannot possibly list each volunteer or agency who has helped our program, we are incredibly thankful.

Kiwanis Club of Christiansburg was named our Community Supporter of the Year. Kiwanis went above and beyond to provide food, furniture, and appliances to NRV families that were in need. This organization provided snack bags to children at Christiansburg Head Start every Friday and even provided hams for all our families at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Mental Health services are contracted through **New River Valley Community Services (NRVCS).** Head Start staff, Mental Health Consultants, and case managers work together to provide mental health services to families and children. A focus of on-going prevention services that promote positive mental health and well-being of children and adults is utilized. Crisis intervention and linkage to services will always be provided as needed. All staff work together to best meet the needs of families and build upon their strengths. Monitoring the mental and emotional health of children, adults, and ourselves is as important as scheduling an annual physical.

Pulaski Church of God loaned land to NRCA Head Start to expand our outdoor play space. In addition, they have allowed our program to use the church's service road to provide a safer and more convenient pick up/drop off experience.

Community Partners continued…

We partnered with the **UVA Cancer Centers Community Outreach** team to incorporate the “Ray and the Sunbeatables”curriculum in all our centers this year.

Nursing students from **New River Community College** help keep our children healthy by taking measurements of their height/weight, measuring blood pressure, and performing assessments for hearing and vision.

Our **community volunteers** help bring fresh faces and educational experiences to our classrooms! Whether they are there to read, garden, do yoga, teach about fire, or police safety, they are always appreciated**!**

Our Head Start and Project Grow and Learn programs partnered with **VCOM** second year medical students to volunteer on Fridays in our classrooms. This partnership fits in nicely with their Special Populations Early Clinical Experiences.

We enjoyed a visit from the local animal shelter, who brought a pet bunny and taught us about bunny safety, care, and their natural environment.

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Head Start Mission

Head Start is a comprehensive early education program for children from at-risk backgrounds. From early math and reading skills to confidence and resilience, we help children build the abilities they need to be successful in school and in life,

New River Community Action Mission

Promote and support the well-being and self-reliance of individuals, families, and communities.

Visit the NRCA website: https://www.newrivercommunityaction.org

Contact Us

New River Community Action Head Start
206 3rd Ave .
Radford, VA. 24141
Phone: (540) 633-5133

Or reach your local Head Start Center directly:

Christiansburg
135 Church St, Christiansburg
(540) 381-7559

Blacksburg
701 Church St, Blacksburg
(540) 552-0490

Pulaski
1520 Bob White Blvd, Pulaski
(540) 994-5740

NRCC Early Learning Center
5251 College Dr, Dublin
(540) 674-3600 ext. 4420

Fairlawn Campus
6671 Riverlawn Ct, Fairlawn
(540) 217-9426

Floyd
120 Epperly Mill Rd, Floyd
(540) 745-2120

Pearisburg
1105 Henson Ave, Pearisburg
(540) 921-2355
Macy (Giles) – (540) 921-1363

Classrooms housed by public schools:
Margaret Beeks – (540) 951-5700
McHarg Elementary – (540) 731-3652 ext. 3029
Floyd Elementary School – (540) 745-9440