

Head Start and Early Head Start Grants

The following are key reasons and recommendations for release of the Head Start and Early Head Start (EHS) grants. The current 5-year grant cycle for both grants will be completed at the end of 2025. This creates an opportunity for the community to consider the purpose and need of the program within the district.

District Resident Student Prioritization – The majority of Head Start and Early Head Start families we currently serve and have served are not Lake Orion residents. The Head Start/EHS grants require service to any family presenting the highest need in all Oakland and Livingston Counties. This creates an issue when Lake Orion Community Schools residents attempt to register for programs at the district Early Childhood Center, but do not qualify as highest need for the grant program. These families are often placed on lengthy waitlists while out of district students have access to programming. After the recent bond and build of the Early Childhood Center, successfully approved by the community, it was determined that enrollment priority be given to school district resident students. The release of the Head Start and Early Head Start grants upon the completion of the 2025 summer schedule, gives Lake Orion Community Schools Early Childhood Programs the flexibility to create classrooms based on community need within our own district beginning in the fall.

Attendance and Services – Related to the residency topic stated above is attendance and services available to students. Head Start and Early Head Start students have shown low attendance over several years. The grant requires 85% or above weekly attendance. The program in Lake Orion has consistently been under 70% the entire school year. The major contributing factor to low attendance is out of district residency. In addition, district student services, such as special education, are only provided to children residing in the school district borders. When a need arises for a child out of school borders, the program must seek out support from the student's district of residence or county agencies. This has delayed the access to needed support.

Secure Funding – Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded grants. Federal grant funding does not appear to be secure from day to day. This year Oakland Livingston Head Start Agency (OLHSA), which is where the funding is supplied to Lake Orion Community Schools, has been informed of a decrease in funding by ninety-six students or "slots" countywide. The agency is expecting further funding decrease of 5-10% in the coming year. The release of the grant slots would allow the program to secure funding through alternative sources that do not restrict district student prioritization such as the state funded Great Start Readiness Program, Department of Health & Human Service subsidy and tuition.

Classroom Capacity – One of the major hurdles in the Early Head Start program is the class size requirements. Early Head Start does not allow any more than eight students within a classroom regardless of square footage. Restructuring the classroom using alternative funding, would increase the capacity by 4-8 students of the same age. The

class could go from a maximum of eight students to a maximum of sixteen students, or older students up to 20 FTE. This change would allow for a significant increase in our ability to serve the community and the need.

Enrollment and Requirements – As presented in previous board approval requests to separate the Head Start and GSRP funding, the Head Start requirements for funding are restrictive to the district and the structure of individual classrooms. The Head Start grant does not work with the state GSRP grant program to coordinate and combine services that are required. This creates a large amount of stress for the administrative and teaching staff working to support these families and this community. By releasing the Head Start grant, the Early Childhood Department would have better flexibility and less regulation in working to offer the best educational experience to the students. The Head Start grant requires that the students supported under this funding be separated from all other students regarding their education and daily activity. This is not best practice in early childhood education and creates socio-economic division early in a student's educational journey. The goal of the Lake Orion Community Schools ECC is to create an inclusive and welcoming environment that will not separate or create a clear division based upon risk factors in a student's life. The goal is to have all students combined and intertwined in classes while serving families and the students with needs privately and individually.

Ability to Serve – If there is a concern about the ability to still serve those in the district that have financial need, there are options. Currently, the state is offering the opportunity for unlimited allocation for universal pre-k for the entire state. All four-year-olds in the state of Michigan will have the opportunity to attend pre-k at no cost. Also, these families that have a financial need can apply for financial support through the Department of Health and Human Services. As an example, for the current 24/25 school year, families that have DHHS support have received payment for services at a rate of \$6.75 per hour. This will benefit families in need with pre-k and/or childcare funding.

The current Head Start and Early Head Start allocation serves forty students (32 HS/8 EHS). All these students have guaranteed placement in programs at no cost in the Early Childhood Center for the 25-26 school year.