

2025-2026 Duluth Public Schools Head Start Self Assessment Report

Purpose of Self Assessment

Head Start Performance Standard §1302.102(b)(2)(i) indicates that a program must effectively oversee progress towards program goals on an ongoing basis and annually must conduct a self-assessment that uses program data, and professional development and parent and family engagement data as appropriate, to evaluate the program's progress towards meeting program goals, compliance with program performance standards throughout the program year and the effectiveness of the professional development and family engagement systems in promoting school readiness.

Head Start Performance Standard §1302.102(c)(2)(iv) indicates that a program must use information from ongoing monitoring and the annual self-assessment, and program data on teaching practice, staffing and professional development, child-level assessments, family needs assessments, and comprehensive services, to identify program needs, and develop and implement plans for program improvement.

Questions that helped guide the process were:

- Is our program meeting the Head Start Performance Standards?
- Are our services responding to the changing needs of children and families?
- Is the program achieving the continued goals for the 2025-26 program year?

Duluth Head Start used a process for the self assessment that involved teams, focus groups, surveys and program data to determine success in the following areas:

1. High Quality Preschool Classrooms
2. Responding to the Unique Needs of our Community
3. Fostering Resilience with a Focus on Health and Wellness
4. Program Management and Quality Improvement
5. Family Engagement and Enrollment

Program Strengths

Duluth Head Start is a school based program with a mission to create a strong learning community in order to achieve success in the classroom and beyond. Currently located in eight of the eight elementary schools in Duluth, MN, spread across this 27 mile long city, along the shores of Lake Superior.

Independent School District 709, Duluth is identified as the Head Start grantee. Head Start has been in our public schools since 1965 and is staffed by certified teachers, and paraprofessionals, represented by the school district bargaining units. The wages and benefits align with that of other District 709 employees. The collaboration and partnership between Head Start and District 709, allows for multiple opportunities to work together through initiatives and programs in support of children and families. The Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRPD) student assessment data will support the selected age-appropriate experiences, high quality preschool classroom design, and family engagement, all preparing our children for kindergarten.

Methodology

Program leadership, collaborative school partners, the Head Start planning team, and Head Start Parent Policy Council provided input into the program's self assessment methods and direction. The program self assessment was conducted through survey, staff conversations, focus groups, data review, staff and parent interviews, and a review of community needs reports. This methodology was approved by the Policy Council on February 12, 2026 and provides an opportunity for self assessment in the following program areas :

1. High Quality Classrooms
2. Responding to the Needs of Our Community
3. Fostering Resilience with a Focus on Health and Wellness
4. Program Management and Quality Improvement
5. Parent, Family, and Community Engagement; Enrollment; Transportation

High Quality Preschool Classrooms

High quality preschool classrooms are identified in research as programming that supports the development of children across domains. A rich environment of experiences, with a focus on the social/emotional developmental domain is the foundation from which student growth and learning occurs. The relationships between teachers and children, teachers and families, along with play-based learning and qualified staff members contribute to high quality preschool classrooms. High-quality preschool classrooms bolster student success, across developmental domains, supporting optimal child outcomes.

The Pyramid Model, first introduced to the Duluth Preschool Program in 2017, has been fully implemented into the fabric of the preschool program. The Pyramid Model evidence-based teaching practices begin with an effective workforce, nurturing and responsive relationships, resulting in high quality supportive environments. The parent engagement components of the Pyramid Model, support the home-school connection, with shared tools, language, and practices.

The data around challenging behaviors, including, but not limited to physical aggression, elopement, uncontrolled tantruming, self harm, and withdrawal can be shared with parents and allowing the data to tell the child's story. In addition, the Preschool Support Team, the classroom team and families, use the data to problem solve and coach one another in support of a child's social/emotional development and success in the classroom setting. Our Behavior Incident Reports (BIRs), 1200 from September 14, 2025 through March 31, 2026 indicate that child aggression towards peers and then staff are the most reported this program year. The BIRs indicated that child elopement is the second most reported challenging behavior, demonstrated by children in the Duluth Preschool Program.

Responding to the Unique Needs of Our Community

The unique needs of the Duluth Community are informed by the following:

- Climate:
 - 40.6 inches of snowfall, with warmer than average winter temperatures

- Homelessness:
 - At the time of this report, 20 enrolled children were identified as homeless. This number changes on a monthly basis. The unique needs of homeless children

are supported by classroom teams, community partners and through our birth to 5 State of Minnesota Head Start FIT Program and the District 709 FIT collaboration.

- **The mental health and well-being of the children we serve:** The most current data collected through program behavior incident reports (BIRs) indicates that challenging behaviors are a part of our preschool classrooms. The Duluth Preschool Program has recorded 1200 BIRs, between September 2025 and March 2026 or 109 days of preschool programming. Support for mental health and well-being, as dictated by Head Start Performance Standard 1302.45 invites the following approach in service to our enrolled preschool children.
 - To support a program-wide culture that promotes mental health, social and emotional well-being, and overall health and safety, a program must use a multidisciplinary approach.
 - Ensures mental health consultation services are available at a frequency of at least once a month.
 - *Mental health consultants.* A program must ensure that mental health consultants provide consultation services that build the capacity of adults in an infant or young child's life to strengthen and support the mental health and social and emotional development of children.

In addition, the mental health team supports families and classrooms through the Preschool Support Team (PST). This is a collaboration between families and classroom staff seeking to support children in the social/emotional domain in both classroom and home. The PST collaboration allows teams to review behavior data, investigate the function of a child's behavior and share the child's school story, while learning about the child's home story, as expressed through the child's behavior.

Together, the family and preschool staff create an individual plan for the child. The plan is titled "scaffold to success". The goal is to support the success of the child

across developmental domains, allowing for practice of skills, building of new skills and any needed adjustments along the way. Scaffolding for success represents Duluth Preschool's response to Minnesota's Successful Learner Equation.

- **Nature based programming:** Nature based preschool programs are some of the fastest growing preschool program types in MN and the US. During the course of this grant and its extension, we have maintained 4 Nature Playscapes at schools with the highest concentration of poverty in the Duluth Public Schools. In addition to the playscapes, we have continued to provide children with high quality outdoor gear so they can feel comfortable outside in any weather.
- **Oshki-Inwewin:** This bicultural preschool incorporates Ojibwe language and culture into programming. It draws families from across the city who are interested in having this experience for their children. It is located in an elementary school that houses an Ojibwe language immersion program. Interest in this program continues to grow.
- **Artist in Residence Program:** We partner with the Duluth Art Institute to provide an artist in residence program for full day classrooms. Artists provide an art lesson for 9 weeks and then have an art showcase at the end of the experience. We plan to continue this going forward.
- **Scholarships:** Our program partners with various community partners offering enrichment opportunities for children and families. Several of these have streamlined scholarship applications so that families' participation in Head Start indicates eligibility taking the burden of proof of the family.

Fostering Resilience with a Focus on Health and Wellness

YMCA Partnership:

Our partnership with the YMCA provides:

- 2 full day classrooms to attend a six week Safety Around Water class during the school day.
- Day passes for every Head Start staff and family
- In spring of 2026, we will add a swim class for Head Start parents - a result of last year's self assessment. This will include childcare. Family Advocates worked to recruit adults to attend this opportunity.

Health and Wellness for Staff:

Our Health and Wellness Committee provides breakfast for staff at each of our staff meetings. Staff also have the opportunity to provide input, anonymously through the 'preschool suggestion box'. Staff input is reviewed by program coordinators and addressed through the weekly Friday Updates from the Director. To date, 7 anonymous suggestions have been submitted and received responses, through this platform.

Reflective Practice and Supervision : Duluth Preschool staff were encouraged to engage with one another through opportunities at our staff training/ professional development days and staff meetings. Reflective Practice such as this, is a common Early Childhood process that helps staff feel supported and seen by colleagues and supervisors.

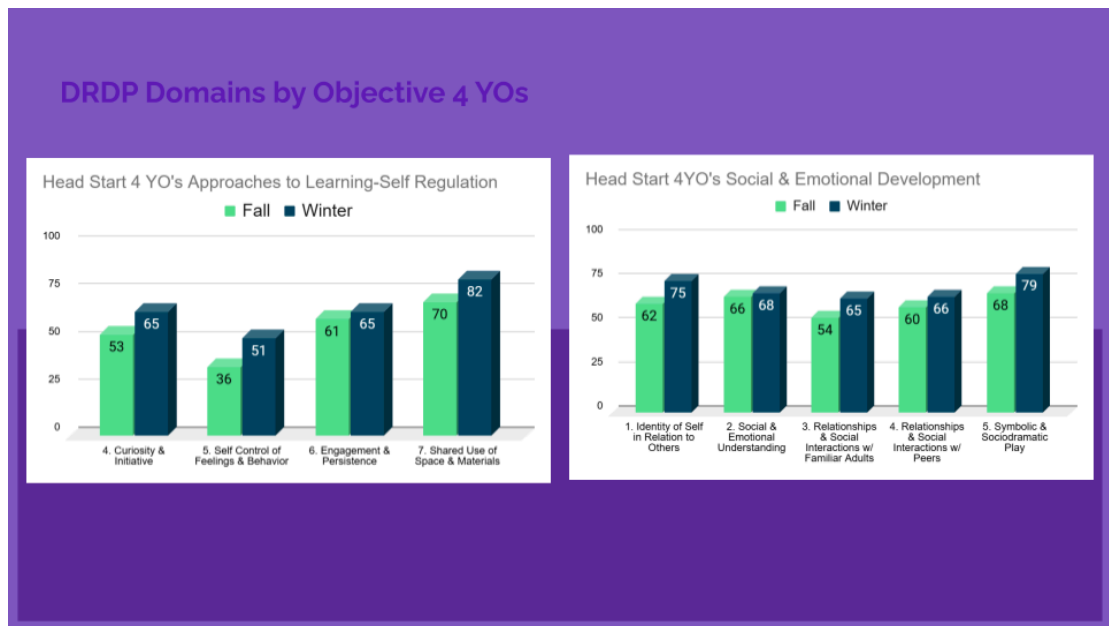
Professional Development: The Duluth Preschool Program has moved under Community Education, in the Duluth Public Schools Organizational Chart. This move has informed some of the staff development opportunities throughout the

2025-26 program year. The staff provided input into staff development opportunities utilizing the Coordinator Team, Planning Team and staff surveys. In addition, the Duluth Preschool Program has partnered with the Duluth Public Schools Professional Development Department and Community Education to plan staff professional development. The onboarding of classroom staff was more intentional this program year, with teacher and paraprofessional mentoring, in real time and with an approved paraprofessional on-boarding checklist. Staff feedback on both the mentoring and checklist have been favorable.

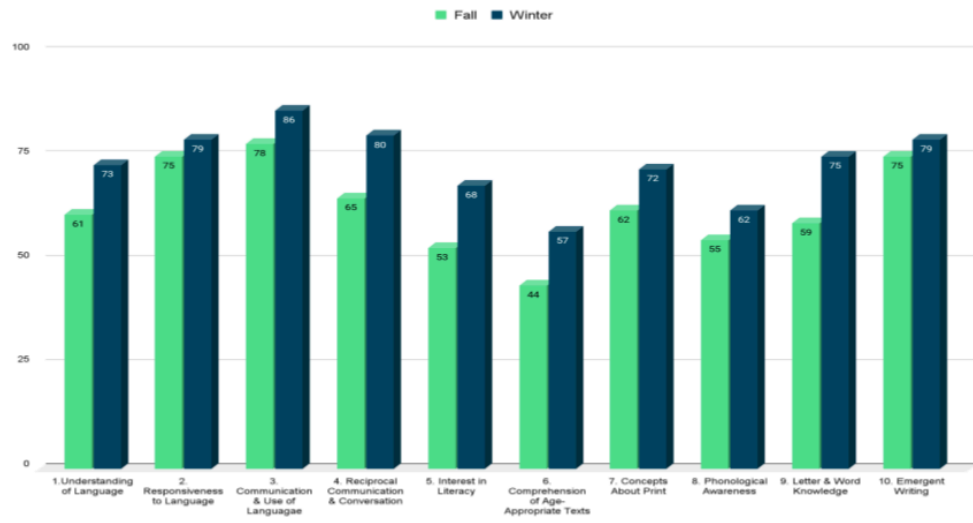
School Readiness

Head Start is a school readiness program, as defined by the Office of Head Start. The Desired Results Developmental Profile or DRDP results for the Fall 2025 and Winter 2026 are as follows:

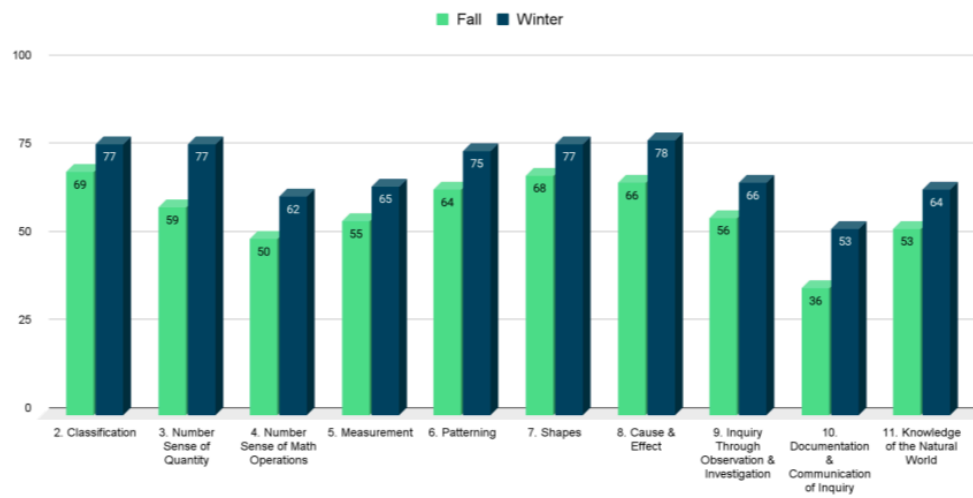
- 254 3-5 year olds enrolled at checkpoint cutoff
- 96% assessed
- 4% “Elected Not to Rate” (10 children-chronic absences)



Head Start 4 YO's Language & Literacy Development



Head Start 4 YO's Cognition, Including Math & Science



Program Management and Quality Improvement

Federal Monitoring: We were monitored by the Office of Head Start in the spring of 2024. There was one finding that was corrected regarding Oral Health Determination. Several program strengths were noted including:

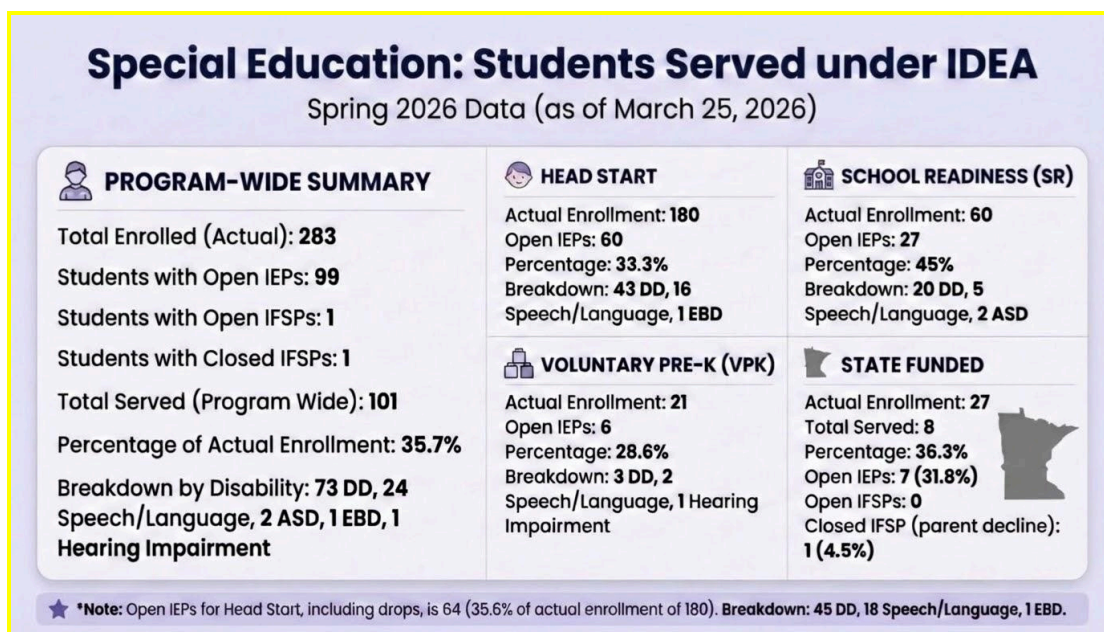
- Formal systems that remove barriers for policy council member participation
- Use of ongoing program data to innovate in the classroom based on needs of individual or subgroups of students
- Regularly offering families information or activities designed to support families' mental health and wellness
- Solicits and uses inputs from families to improve programming
- Provides economic mobility support to help families with pathways out of poverty
- Continuously evaluates the success of recruitment strategies and adjusts strategies as appropriate
- Provides targeted support for children and families who are at risk of low attendance

Internal Monitoring: We monitor classrooms twice per year: in the fall and spring. We monitor to see the following:

- Pyramid Model practices are in place
- Evidence of curriculum fidelity
- Active Supervision procedures are in place
- Meals are being served family style
- Health/Allergy information

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The LRE is defined as placement of a child to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in

public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled. Duluth Preschool offers an LRE through inclusive preschool programming, partnering with the Duluth Public Schools Special Education Department. The acceptance and placement of students is a collaborative process, seeking to place children in their “home” school. The collaboration with teachers, IEP casemanagers, program leadership, program coordinators and families, contributes to the overall inclusion of children of differing abilities into the Duluth Preschool Program.



Transportation Internal Monitoring: Transportation is monitored three times per year, at the beginning of the school year, after the winter break, and in April following Spring break

We look to see upon arrival at school that

- Bus vests are being used
- Children are not released until teachers are present
- Staff are maintaining active supervision as they walk children to the classroom

- Drivers have current Release To information
- Drivers are in possession of a current route sheet

At home drop off stops we look to see that

- Parents are going up to the bus to pick children up

When a child is returned to school because an adult was not present, that provides evidence that our plan is being followed.

Bus Concern Forms are used when staff or families have concerns about a parent, driver, or child's behaviors. This form is sent to our Enrollment Coordinator who follows up with them. Bus Concern forms were completed in 2025-26, through an on-line platform. In addition, the District Transportation Coordinator, follows up with our Transportation Coordinator, regarding any ridership concerns.

Enrollment

We were identified in 2023 as being chronically under enrolled. This was due, in large part, to us limiting enrollment in classrooms struggling with challenging student behavior. Some behaviors made it difficult to keep classrooms safe.

We have worked toward and maintained the required full enrollment for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school year. We continue to review our enrollment process annually, making any needed adjustments to the process. Contributing to this process is the quarterly Office Flow Meeting. This meeting has been established to create pathways for talking through changes, challenges, and celebrations, in the Duluth Preschool Office culture.

Finally, we have created a recruitment team, including our clerical team member, our business manager, the ERSEA Coordinator, the Inclusion Coordinator, and the

Director that meets 2 times per year to look at sites that may need strategic recruitment and child placements, along with a recruitment timeline to keep us on track with the many tasks involved in launching a new program year.

Family Engagement

Parent Committee meetings at sites have had low attendance (2-11 families), with the exception of the very first one of the year: the Ice Cream Social, held in September and early October, which had 8-17 families in attendance across all sites. We have seen success in bringing families together, when we invite them from across the city to meet at community sites like The Depot or Bayfront Park. Attendance numbers up to 117 individuals have been recorded at the city-wide events. Attendance at city wide events feels satisfying for family advocates and pleasurable for families, allowing both to connect over preselected themes like, health and wellness, challenging behaviors, nutrition, mental health, and family routines.

Program Facilities

Per Head Start and the Department of Human Services: Minnesota Child Care Centers need a minimum of 35 square feet of usable indoor space per child, with specific exclusions like hallways and closets, but centers also need 75 sq. ft. per child outdoors. Up to 25% of space occupied by furniture or equipment can count towards the total.

The current funding allows for 306 student slots. There are 8 classrooms currently accepting student placement, with 18 class sessions= 18 students per session

Program Staffing

Past practice was also used this program year to support the need for teacher subs. Certified staff: Family Advocates and Program Coordinators select 2 days per month as: “back up” teacher/para subs. Community Education is funding a float paraprofessional position, beginning 1/5/26 and ending 3/31/26.

The number of teacher absences (Frontline) September: 13/ October: 27 /November: 24 /December: 25.5/January 22/February 23/March 19. The number of para absences(Frontline) September: 38/October: 41 /November: 35 /December: 35.5/January 46/February 44/March 48 The requirement for fingerprinting of subs increased the difficulty in filling absences, through Kelly Education. There are currently 13 teacher subs and 11 paraprofessional subs, who meet the fingerprinting requirement.

Noteworthy Additions

The Office of Head Start has indicated that the competitive NOFO grant will be released during the Summer of 2026. Competition allows us an opportunity to redefine how our program responds to identified community needs.

Recommendations

The following program wide recommendations support continuous quality improvement.

1. Continue to explore opportunities to hire and engage more substitute paraprofessionals and teachers, through a continued partnership with Kelly Education
2. Continue to build staff capacity in working with challenging child behaviors, both through strengthening intervention strategies, teacher mentoring and collaborative observations and ongoing parent partnership
3. Continue Internal Monitoring, supporting individual sites and staff through a parallel process seeking optimal outcomes for our children and their families.
4. Continue to support teams in inputting data through Child Plus and Educlimber (BIRs), informing program decisions through data collections and exploration.
5. Continue to explore program goals for the NOFO 2026-31

By signing below, this report has been approved by the Governing Board and Head Start Policy Council.

_____ Kelly Durick-Eder, School Board Chair

_____ Date

_____ Danielle Baublitz, Policy Council Chair

_____ Date