



GWYᎠ DBF  
CHEROKEE NATION®  
Early Childhood Unit



**2024/25**

*Annual Report*

In 1964, the federal government asked a panel of child development experts to draw up a program to help communities overcome the handicap of disadvantaged preschool children. The findings of that panel report became the blueprint for Project Head Start.

Project Head Start, launched as an eight-week summer program by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1965, was designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. Recruiting children age three to school entry age, Head Start was enthusiastically received by education, child development specialists, community leaders and parents across the nation.

In 1969, Head Start was transferred from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Child Development in the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and has now become a program within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services. A well-established, though still innovative program, Head Start has had a strong impact on communities and early childhood programs across the country. Each year, Head Start serves many American Indian, migrant, urban and rural children and their families in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Pacific Insular Areas.

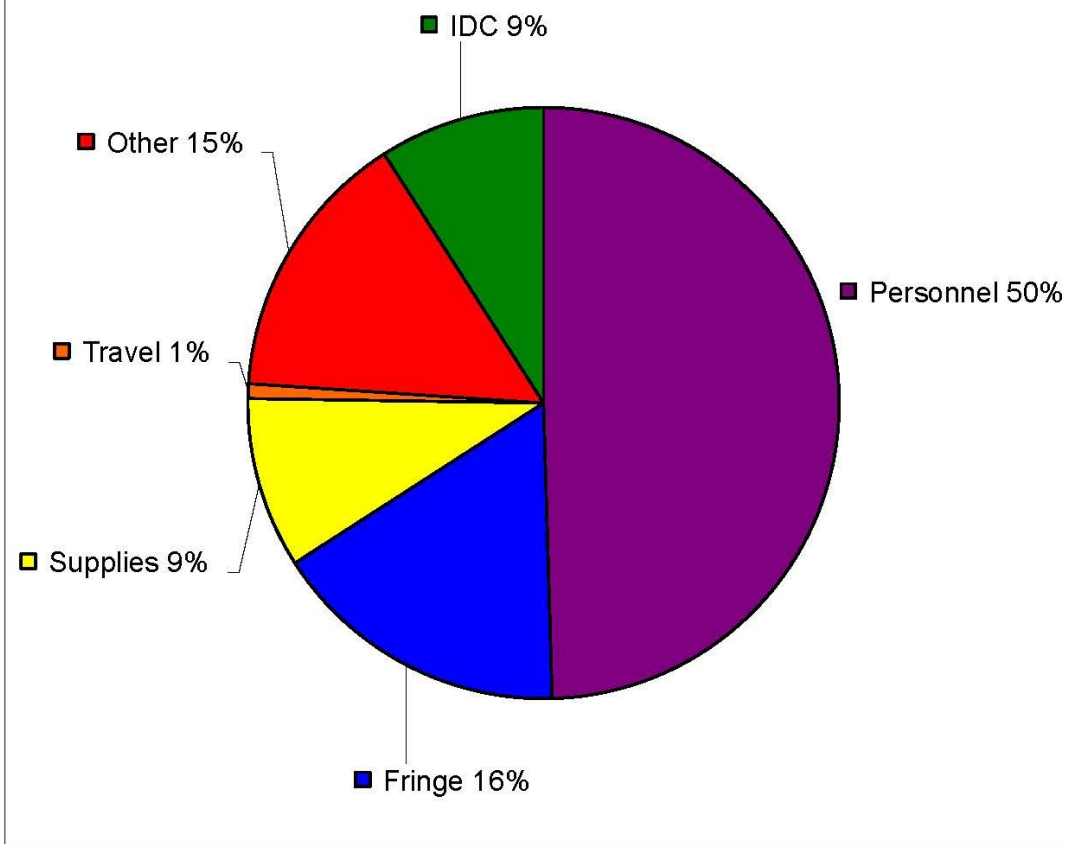
The Cherokee Nation Head Start Program was originally funded in 1978 for 120 children—six centers with 20 children each.

Research indicated early intervention was needed before the age of three; therefore funds were made available for the “Early Head Start” (EHS) initiative in 1995. The Cherokee Nation further expanded services to include pregnant women and birth to three years old in 1996. The Cherokee Nation was the first Native American Head Start program to be funded in a five-state area for 75 families. The EHS program was operational on August 1, 1997. In 2009, 48 Infants and Toddlers were added through ARRA funding at two new sites located on public school campuses. Since 1978, the Cherokee Nation Early Childhood Unit has steadily grown in funded slots and partnerships with various community service-oriented agencies. Present day enrollment is 680 Head Start children and 200 Early Head Start infants & toddlers. The CNECU has been the subject of six EHS research projects with several universities.

This document is a general profile of current Cherokee Nation Early Childhood Unit operations.



### FY 2024 Cherokee Nation Early Childhood Unit Funding Categories

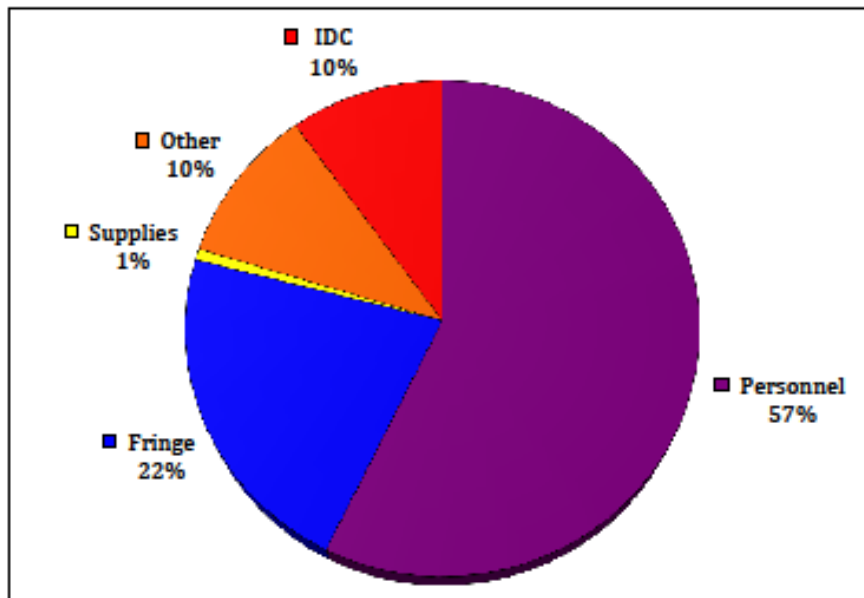


Proposed FY 2024 Budget	
CATEGORIES	
Personnel	\$ 6,431,081
Fringe	\$ 2,123,456
Supplies	\$ 1,213,678
Travel	\$ 103,925
Other	\$ 1,933,658
IDC	\$ 1,176,518
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 12,982,316</b>

<b>Children Served:</b>	<b>880</b>
FUNDING SOURCES	
DHHS-ACF-OHS	\$ 11,790,397
DOI-SG	\$ 43,626
CACFP	\$ 287,000
Tribal Motor Vehicle Tax	\$ 45,026
Tribal Supplemental Funds	\$ 816,267
<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>\$ 12,982,316</b>
Non-Federal Share:	1,579,235



## FY 2023 Cherokee Nation Early Childhood Unit "Tribal Dollars at Work"



### CATEGORIES EXPENDED

Personnel	\$ 446,628
Fringe	\$ 169,647
Supplies	\$ 5,602
Other	\$ 80,308
IDC	\$ 78,136
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 780,321</b>

### FUNDING LEVELS

Supplemental	\$ 558,376
Full Day	\$ 180,000
MVT	\$ 41,945
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 780,321</b>

In FY 2023, funds that were awarded to the Head Start and Early Head Start programs through the tribal council via The Head Start Act of 2013 were expended as follows: One hundred three teachers and nine lead teachers continued to realize an increase in salary that was competitive with the Oklahoma State Teacher and Teacher Aid Salary Scale. Full day or after school funds were used to offset the cost of providing full day services from 2:30 to 5:30 pm after the Head Start and Early Head Start day ends. This is an additional cost to the program that is not provided within the federal funding parameter. It is a benefit to Cherokee families in the Pryor, Salina, and Tahlequah areas, assisting working parents or those in school.

Additionally, funding appropriated by the tribal council was very beneficial to the continuing, successful operations of the CNECU. The supplies and other categories were used to help offset federal funding. For instance, these funds were used to help with training costs of all staff of the CNECU by covering travel costs and to purchase training materials as required by the federal funding agency. Classroom supplies and equipment were acquired, such as books, other educational, phonemic supplies, and musical supplies to improve learning, phonological awareness, and verbal/writing/language skills. Other supplies purchased were classroom equipment and toys for gross and fine motor development. Math, science, technological, and art supplies were acquired to develop learning and knowledge of numbers, shapes, patterns, biology, expression, and creativity. Other costs, including utilities and insurance for the program, were expended to supplement federal funding of the program.

Enrollment by Cherokee Nation District

District Number	Tribal Council Representative	Centers Located Within District	EHS Enrollment	HS Enrollment	Total Student Cost Per District
<b>One</b>	Sasha Blackfox-Qualls	Tahlequah Early Learning Academy, Sequoyah PS, Nvdo, Agali, Kalvgv, Shady Grove, Hulbert	32	248	<b>\$2,605,506.80</b>
<b>Two</b>	Candessa Teehee	n/a	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Three</b>	Lisa Hall	James Danielson Children's Village	72	34	<b>\$1,475,122.90</b>
<b>Four</b>	Mike Dobbins	n/a	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Five</b>	E.O. Smith	Webbers Falls PS	0	20	<b>\$165,701.00</b>
<b>Six</b>	Daryl Legg E.O Smith	Brushy PS Belfonte	0	57	<b>\$331,402.00</b>
<b>Seven</b>	Joshua Sam	Cherry Tree, Redbird, Maryetta PS, Zion PS, Rocky Mountain PS	16	205	<b>\$1,943,241.65</b>
<b>Eight</b>	Codey Poindexter	n/a	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Nine</b>	Mike Shambaugh	Kenwood	0	17	<b>\$140,845.85</b>
<b>Ten</b>	Melvina Shotpouch	Salina Early Learning Academy, Salina PS, Jay	48	74	<b>\$1,347,512.90</b>
<b>Eleven</b>	Victoria Vazquez	n/a	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Twelve</b>	Dora Patzkowski	Wauhilla	16	0	<b>\$244,806.40</b>
<b>Thirteen</b>	Joe Deere	n/a	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Fourteen</b>	Kevin Easley, Jr.	n/a	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Fifteen</b>	Danny Callison	Inola PS, Pryor	16	55	<b>\$700,484.15</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>200</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>\$8,954,623.65</b>



*The Sequoyah 3's Head Start Classrooms remained fully operational during the COVID-19 pandemic. The need to serve families with working parents and to continue our public school collaboration served as the basis for continuing services. Thank you to our Sequoyah 3's Faculty for going the extra mile to ensure the safety of the children & families that we serve!*

- **Current Year ECU Funded enrollment ('24/'25):**

Head Start	680
Early Head Start	200
<b>TOTAL CHILDREN</b>	<b>880</b>

- **Early Childhood Unit Employees:**

Administration	5
Mid-Level Management	19
Support Staff	11
Head Start	46
Early Head Start	92
Public School Contracted Positions	34
<b>TOTAL EMPLOYEES</b>	<b>207</b>

- **Public School Collaborations SY 2024-2025**

School	Contract Amt	Qtrly Pmt	IDC Saved	# Children	1st Year
Belfonte	\$ 15,000	\$ 3,750	\$ 1,847.87	40	2021
Brushy	\$ 30,000	\$ 7,500	\$ 3,695.75	40	1995
Hulbert	\$ 30,000	\$ 7,500	\$ 3,695.75	30	2014
Inola	\$ 45,000	\$ 11,250	\$ 5,543.62	60	1995
Maryetta	\$ 90,000	\$ 22,500	\$ 11,087.24	115	1993
Rocky Mountain	\$ 15,000	\$ 3,750	\$ 1,847.87	25	1997
Salina	\$ 30,000	\$ 7,500	\$ 3,695.75	35	1995
Tahlequah*	\$ 150,000	\$ 37,500	\$ 18,478.74	180	2011
Webbers Falls	\$ 15,000	\$ 3,750	\$ 1,847.87	17	1995
Zion	\$ 30,000	\$ 7,500	\$ 3,695.75	50	2000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 450,000</b>	<b>\$ 112,500</b>	<b>\$ 55,436.21</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>87%</b>

\*Additional costs to Tahlequah Public Schools for food cost is approximately \$60,000 annually.

Side Note: Shady Grove also contracts food costs with the Public School for our HS children at an approximate rate of \$16,000 annually.

### New Eligibility Provision

This provision specifies that in FY 2024, and every year after, AIAN programs have the discretion to consider eligibility for Head Start services regardless of income. This provision applies to programs operated by an Indian tribe as defined in the Head Start Act, 42 U.S.C. 9801, or designated by an Indian tribe to operate on its behalf. The new language applies to both tribal and non-tribal children in an AIAN program's service area. This law will increase the number of children in tribal communities who are eligible to participate in Head Start services, including opportunities to participate in activities that engage their Native language and culture.

In accordance with the Head Start regulations at 45 CFR §§[1302.14](#) and [1302.11\(b\)](#), AIAN programs are still required to annually establish selection criteria to enroll children in their service area who would benefit most from Head Start services. These selection criteria must weigh the prioritization of participants based on needs identified in the community needs assessment. (Eligibility Criteria found in narrative)

- **Regulatory Guidelines:**

- DHHS Licensing
- OHS Performance Standards
- Head Start Act
- Cherokee Nation Environmental Health
- Cherokee Nation Risk Management
- ECU Ongoing Monitoring Checklist
- Cherokee Nation Policies & Procedures
- ECU Amended Policies & Procedures

- **Fiscal Year Schedule:**

Head Start & Early Head Start	November 1 - October 31
CACFP	October 1 - September 30
Self Governance	October 1 - September 30
Public School Contracts	July 1 - June 30
Motor Vehicle Revenue	October 1 - September 30
Cherokee Nation Head Start Act Funding	October 1 - September 30

- **Audits:**

- Child and Adult Care Food Program - CACFP
- Cherokee Nation Institutional Audit
- EHS/HS Federal Annual Review
- Office of Head Start School Annual Readiness Teleconference

- **Internal Advisory Boards/Committees/Work Groups:**

Education Advisory Board	Health Advisory Board
Policy Council	Quarterly Superintendent's Meeting
ERSEA Task Force	Community & Family Partners in Advocacy
Staff Advisory Board	Culture & Language Advisory Board

- **E.C.U. Leadership Initiatives:**

Leadership Academy	G.P.S. Leadership Institute
Strategic Planning Committee	Annual Early Childhood Conference
W.I.L.L.s (Women in Long Term Leadership)	
M.I.L.L.s (Men in Long Term Leadership)	

- **Training Opportunities:**

- Annual Pre-Service Training
- Annual Early Childhood Conference
- Early Head Start/Head Start Lead Teacher Training
- Monthly Family Advocate Training
- Monthly New Hire Orientation
- Bi-Weekly Administrative Meetings
- Online Opportunities

- **Annual Renewal Certifications/Trainings:**

Food Handlers ( <i>Bi-Annual</i> )	CPR/1st Aid ( <i>Bi-Annual</i> )
Fire Extinguisher	Medical Administration Training ( <i>Bi-Annual</i> )
Bus Evacuation	Bus Monitor

- **Community & Family Engagement :**

The ECU offers a variety of activities that invite families to be fully engaged in their child's learning experience. Monthly family trainings & meetings, Fall Festival, Week of the Young Child Celebrations, Classroom Celebrations, Policy Council and opportunities to volunteer in the classroom are among the ways that the ECU invites families into the classroom.

Community volunteers play a vital part in the program through In-Kind services or volunteer hours completed within our classrooms. Agencies include local police & fire departments and various Cherokee Nation departments and community agencies.

We look forward to continuing these important collaborations in a safe & responsible manner in the near future.



GW29 D3P  
**CHEROKEE NATION**  
Early Childhood Unit



**MISSION STATEMENT:**

The mission of the ECU is to bring about a greater degree to social competence in children who may be disadvantaged.

The ECU's approach is based on the philosophy that a child can benefit most from a comprehensive, interdisciplinary program to foster development and remedy programs through the involvement of the child's entire family as well as the community.



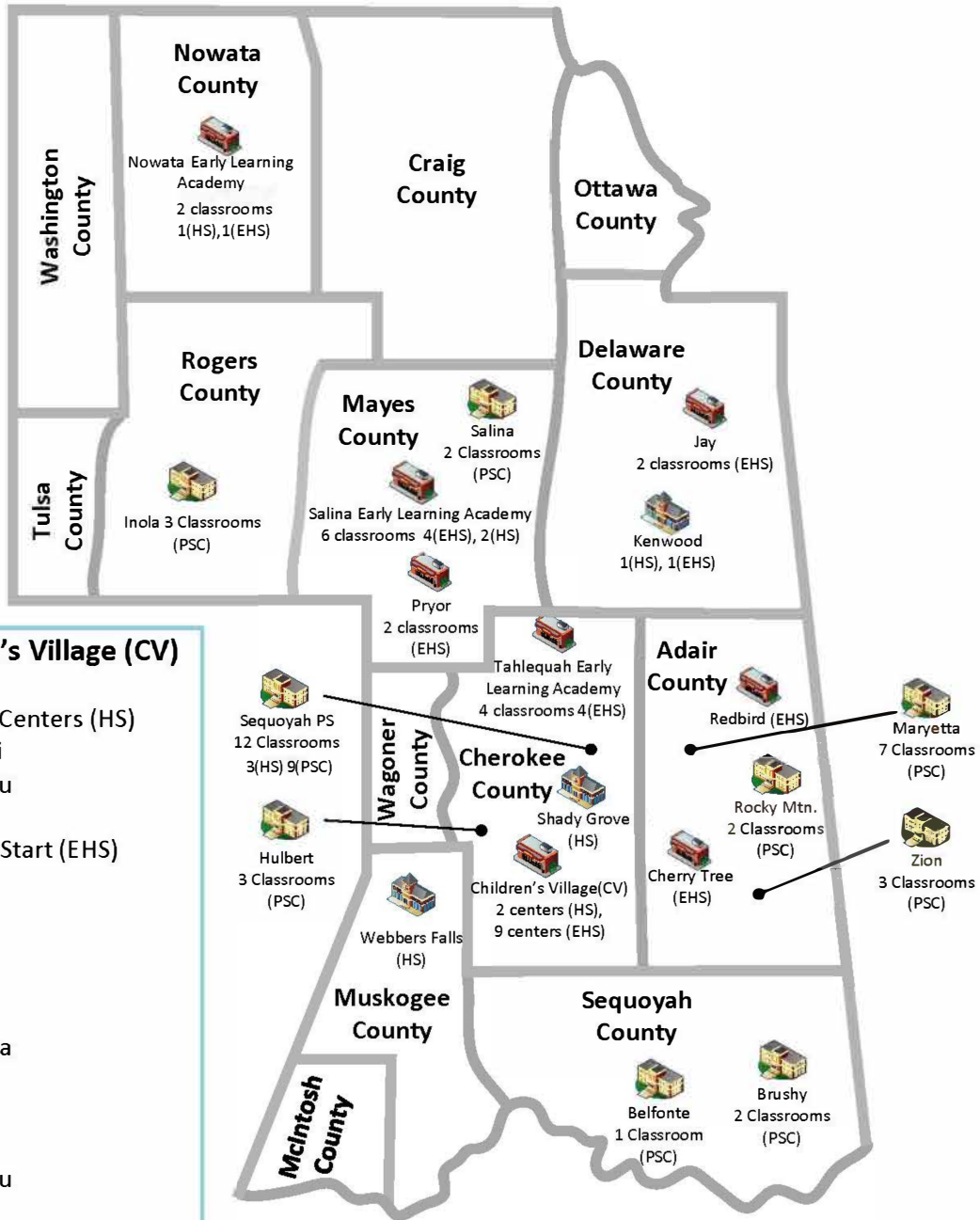
*Although already a regular part of every day classroom routines, CNECU faculty ramped up efforts to teach the children the importance of proper handwashing at all age levels.*

*Basic Facts Cont'd*





# Cherokee Nation Early Childhood Unit Center Locations



- Children's Village (CV)**
- Head Start Centers (HS)**
- Unanvti
  - Didigeyu
- Early Head Start (EHS)**
- Awi
  - Doya
  - Igali
  - Jigilili
  - Jisqua
  - Kamama
  - Oosdi
  - Waya
  - Yona
  - Didigeyu

			
Children's Village (CV) 2 centers (HS), 9 centers (EHS)	Public School Collaborations (PSC)	Head Start (HS)	Early Head Start (EHS)

Cherokee Nation  
Early Childhood Unit  
P.O. Box 948  
Tahlequah, OK 74465

The CNECU Administrative Offices may be reached by calling (918) 453-5757 or toll free 1-888-458-4393. We may also be reached by fax at (918) 458-5799 or by E-mail at [head-start@cherokee.org](mailto:head-start@cherokee.org). The Administrative Offices are located 4 miles south of Tahlequah on Highway 62 next to Sequoyah High School in the James Danielson Children's Village. Our webpage can be found at [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org) by clicking on the Education tab.

Digital copies of this report may be obtained online on the Head Start webpage at [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org).  
Hard copies are available at all ECU Centers and the Main Administrative Office.