

Health has always been at the forefront of Head Start, as part of the program’s “whole child philosophy.” *A child with health issues, whether oral, mental or nutrition concerns, will have difficulty learning.* That’s why it’s up to us, in WestCOP’s early childhood program, to provide the high-quality health services, that will help each child grow.

According to section 1302.40 (a) of Head Start Performance Standards: “A program must provide high-quality health, oral health, mental health, and nutrition services that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and that will support each child’s growth and school readiness. ”

At WestCOP’s Head Start/Early Head Start Centers, these high quality services start by screening all children for health, nutrition, developmental, and social-emotional concerns. These screenings are done by various staff at each Center; they help staff see challenges a child may have, so that we may work alongside the child’s family to address any concerns,

Families play a critical role, collaborating with program staff. The Standards say in 1302.41 (a): “For all activities described in this part, programs must collaborate with parents as partners in the health and well-being of their children in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner and communicate with parents about their child’s health needs and development concerns in a timely and effective manner. ”

Just a few examples of how families and program staff partner together:

- At intake, parents learn about the various screenings the child will have, such as hearing, vision, dental, developmental, social-emotional, and give consent
- At intake, parents share health, mental health, or nutrition concerns (such as allergies!) they may have. This information is shared with the team
- Teachers use the Choosy Kids/I am Moving I am Learning (IMIL) curriculum, and share with parents the activities their child does as part of IMIL!
- Parents are part of the Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) which helps make health policies

In conclusion: All staff, not just Health Specialists, are involved with health: from bus drivers to Family Advocates, Cooks, Teachers, and Mental Health Specialists. Health is always on our mind at WestCOP’s Head Start/Early Head Start programs!

