



## Dunlap Head Start Named #1 Head Start Center in Tennessee

The Dunlap Head Start Center in Sequatchie County has been recognized as the state's best Head Start Center. The award covers the nine-year period from 2000-2009. Receiving recognition for their achievement are (left to right) Dunlap co-teacher Megan Johnson; mentor teacher Judy Flegel; Dunlap Center team leader and family worker Donna Ewton; part-time assistant teacher Jennifer Scoggins; Sequatchie Valley Head Start Director Judy Graham; teacher aide and bus driver Joann Rich; Tennessee Department of Human Services District 4 program evaluator Steve Trussler; teacher and bus driver Stephanie Higdon; nutrition worker Mary Ann Mills; and co-teacher Jennifer Bugg.

All child care centers licensed by the Department of Human Services in Tennessee are evaluated by the state using the ECERS or ITERS rating scales, research-based tools developed at the University of North Carolina. The tools are used to assess how well the classroom meets three basic needs of all children:

- protecting health and safety;
- building relationships with children, parents, the extended family, and the community; and
- providing opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience.

In Tennessee, the center assessment is conducted by an independent evaluator, each of whom undergoes rigid training. In the nine-year-history of the ECERS in Tennessee, Sequatchie Valley Head Start has consistently outperformed not only all other Head Start programs in the state but all other licensed child care facilities as well. Sequatchie Valley operates four of the top five centers in the state. The Dunlap Center surpassed all 367 Head Start centers in Tennessee, as well as every one of the hundreds of other child care centers in the state.

Sequatchie Valley Head Start serves more than 400 children and their families from across five counties straddling 1,867 square miles at the tail end of the Appalachian mountains. From its management headquarters in South Pittsburg in Marion County, the agency operates 23 classrooms, including seven classrooms in Marion County, four in Grundy County, three in Sequatchie County, three in Bledsoe County, and six in Rhea County. The agency employs more than 100 people.

Sequatchie Valley Head Start provides the region's premiere pre-school experience, laying the foundations for academic *and* social success in kindergarten. In addition, the program channels resources from across the state and nation to support families' efforts to make their lives better. Nationally standardized tests demonstrate that, as a group, Sequatchie Valley Head Start children always significantly outperform other pre-school children across the nation — testimony to this agency's successful operations stretching back 25 years to 1985. All classrooms are nationally accredited and all hold the state's highest quality rating.

Head Start is the most successful, longest-running, national school readiness program in the United States. The program has benefited more than 25 million pre-school aged children in the years since it was begun in 1965. Sequatchie Valley Planning and Development Agency has provided Head Start services in the region since 1985. The program provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to high-risk children and their families.