



The Black Belt Community Foundation

DATA IMPACT CENTER

The Black Belt Bulletin

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“BBCF Head Start is changing the trajectory of our kids by empowering them to be better decision makers & to be more emotionally intelligent.”

– Taquila Monroe, BBCF Head Start Director

FREEWILL HEAD START – BROADBAND PROJECT –

In 2021, the BBCF Head Start Program in Wilcox County had to relocate due to a tragic fire at the elementary school where it was previously housed. After a considerable amount of research, an agreement was reached between the Foundation and the Freewill Church of God in Christ to house our Head Start program.

The Freewill Church was a great solution and met all our needs but one: internet services. The minimal DSL service to the building was not fast enough for the innovative technology used by our Head Start program. It was determined that broadband access was the only solution. Mediacom was contracted to complete the new service installation, which would require an underground conduit run of 624 feet from the source to the Church building.

After a lengthy waiting period with delays in construction, the final inspection, installation and activation was completed on June 28, 2023. BBCF IT installed its own router and access points. The level of wireless service to the building was increased by 98%.

The numbers below represent the download & upload speeds of the internet connection at Freewill Church measured in megabits per second (Mbps). Left: Speeds prior to broadband project; Right: Speeds after broadband project.

⬇️ DOWNLOAD Mbps

6.57

⬇️ DOWNLOAD Mbps

269.71

⬆️ UPLOAD Mbps

0.41

⬆️ UPLOAD Mbps

12.73

Thanks to BBCF IT, President Lucky, Pastor Williams, and Denise Drummond (Mediacom Advocate) for their work and support on this project that represents a remarkable improvement in broadband access for our staff and students.

BBCF Head Start 1st in AL with Newest Tech

Head Start is a national program begun in 1965 during President Johnson’s “Great Society” campaign as part of the War on Poverty. Since 2017, the Black Belt Community Foundation has operated six Head Start programs, for children ages 3-5, located in four Black Belt counties (Choctaw, Dallas, Marengo and Wilcox) serving 307 children annually. With a budget of \$4 million dollars and a staff of over 70 personnel, BBCF Head Start is one of the premiere early childhood educational programs in the state.



President Lucky engages with student during visit to Head Start classroom in April '22.

Head Start is advantageous in that it differs from public school Pre-K and local daycare programs in many ways, according to BBCF President, Felecia Lucky. “Head Start focuses on the whole child with an emphasis on education, health, nutrition, and social-emotional well-being, while preparing them to enter elementary school. In addition, we provide family support and promote family involvement”, says Lucky.

The latest technology-based innovation for BBCF Head Start classrooms will be in use this fall. Children will have access to the newly purchased **IgniteTable by Hatch™**. These digital devices promote collaboration by having children engage



Example photo of students using IgniteTable.



Taquila Monroe, Executive Director of BBCF Head Start

in knowledge-based, problem-solving activities that also enhance their social-emotional learning. According to Taquila Monroe, Executive Director of BBCF Head Start, “We are the first in the state of Alabama to purchase IgniteTable for every Head Start classroom in our program. BBCF Head Start is changing the trajectory of our kids by empowering them to be better decision makers and to be more emotionally intelligent. We are taking STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) to a whole new level.”

Research supports the advantages Head Start provides children through adulthood. A 2021 study noted that students enrolled in Head Start ended up having substantially higher high school completion, college enrollment and college completion rates than comparable children who were not enrolled in Head Start.

Families interested in learning more about the BBCF Head Start program, or enrolling their children in Head Start for the upcoming school year should contact Judith Hardy, Family Service Coordinator, at 334-349-0372 or 334-419-2019.

Sources: aeaweb.org (Bailey, Sun, & Timpe, 2021); hatchearlylearning.com/technology/ignitetable

BBCF Head Start Facts, Figures, and Locations

State-funded pre-k programs have a 1:10 teacher to student ratio while Head Start has a 2:15 teacher to student ratio for early childhood, which provides more flexibility and opportunity to support the children more because of the smaller session size.



Head Start ensures children are provided hearing, vision, and developmental/social-emotional screenings so we can know how to better support the children.

