

Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2021

(December 1, 2020 – November 30, 2021)

Introduction

Head Start is a federally funded child development program serving income-eligible children and families. Nationwide, nearly one million children are currently enrolled in Head Start programs. Eligibility is limited primarily to children living below the poverty level, which in 2021 equated to \$26,500 of gross income for a family of four.

The overriding goal of the Head Start program is to prepare children for their successful entry into Kindergarten. National research shows a significant “readiness gap” exists among children entering kindergarten which is most often related to family income. Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana utilizes a research-based curriculum focused on multiple child development domains in order to eliminate this readiness gap and provide children a ‘head start’ to a successful school experience.

The Muskegon Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) partners with area school districts throughout Muskegon and Oceana counties in order to integrate pre-school Head Start services into the school learning environment. Early Head Start focuses on developing parenting skills and healthy child development among the program’s birth-to-three children and families. Significant efforts are dedicated to parent engagement. This includes home visits and addressing the needs of each child relating to nutrition, physical health, mental health, and disabilities.

Program by the Numbers

- 4,776 – Home visits conducted with Early Head Start families (pregnant women and families with birth-to-three children)
- 1,833 – Home visits conducted with Head Start families (families with pre-school aged children)
- 33,981 – Recorded family reading hours with HS & EHS children (20% increase from prior year)
- 99% - Children have a primary care doctor
- 27 – Head Start and EHS foster children served
- 6% - Families experiencing homelessness
- 32,582 - Free books provided to Head Start/EHS children

Enrollment & Attendance

During the 2020-21 program year, the MAISD was funded to provide services to 666 Head Start children and 165 Early Head Start participants. Head Start offered services in thirty-five classrooms throughout the two counties. Fifteen family service workers provided weekly home-visiting services to Early Head Start participants. In each month the program was fully enrolled with such data reported to federal officials.

A continued program-wide emphasis on preschool attendance resulted in a 90.2% average daily attendance rate for the 2020-21 school year. This was a record high attendance for the program’s history.

A summary of various enrollment statistics for the 2020-21 period follows:

- Head Start children served: 507 (reduced to due COVID-19 limitations)
- Early Head Start participants: 205
- Enrollment: 100%
- Year-end attendance rate: 90.2%
- Percent of four-year-olds in Head Start classrooms: 69%
- Percent of children served being racial minorities: 49%

- Children served with special needs: 19.5%
- Second-year or returning Head Start children: 35%

2020-21 program waiting lists were far lower than in a typical year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. At the conclusion of the school year (June 2021), there were a total of 54 children on Head Start (41 children) and Early Head Start (13) waiting lists. Using county birth numbers and federal census data regarding childhood poverty, it is estimated that Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana served approximately thirty-five percent of the income-eligible children living in the service area; the local state preschool program known as Great Start Readiness serves an additional 47% of the income-eligible population.

Children Enrolled in the Program Receiving Medical & Dental Services

Linking families with permanent medical and dental “homes” is a critical piece to establishing stability and long-term health care for Head Start and Early Head Start families and children. Starting young children out in life on a healthy track is critical to supporting their early learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant and unique challenges to achieving compliance with all health requirements during the 2020-21 program year. Yet, program-wide results were impressive despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.

- 99% of children covered by medical insurance
- 100% of children assigned to a primary medical provider
- 92% of children were current with the state’s EPSDT schedule (age-appropriate primary health care services)
- 95% up-to-date with age-appropriate immunizations
- 92% received a dental exam
- 100% of pregnant women received prenatal care

Parent & Family Involvement Activities

Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana believes that parents are a child’s first and most important life-long teacher. Engaged parents and family members are keys to a child’s success. The Head Start and Early Head Start program assists family members to take an active role in their child’s education, both now and in their future K-12 school years. Home visits by staff occur regularly throughout the year. A “Family Engagement Contract” focuses on items such as children’s attendance, sleep, parent-child at-home activities, reading, and positive adult-child activities.

The program sponsors a variety of parent and family involvement activities, including the following examples:

- Establishing Family Self-Sufficiency & Partnership Goals with a strong focus on regular class attendance and reading with one’s child
- Research-based parenting classes
- Family Literacy Nights
- Family Fun Nights
- Dads on Deck Fatherhood Initiative
- Conscious Discipline Social-Emotional Parenting Series
- Many referrals and partnerships with community agencies serving local families

Transitioning Children to Kindergarten

Three hundred and eleven children were transitioned into Kindergarten classrooms from Head Start for the 2021-22 school year (61% of all Head Start participants). In partnership with local school districts, several collaborative efforts take place to transition children from Head Start into Kindergarten in a seamless and child-friendly manner. Kindergarten enrollment packets are provided to Head Start families, and Kindergarten registration information is reviewed with them personally. In addition, parents and children visit Kindergarten classrooms via Head Start field trips, attend Kindergarten orientation, and attend round-ups and conferences.

Funding

The United States Department of Health and Human Services provides funding to Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana to operate the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The Muskegon Area ISD received \$8,704,810 from the federal government for the grant year ended 11/30/21 for base operating and technical assistance funding. In addition, \$1,217,397 was awarded for one-time COVID-19 pandemic-related expenditures. USDA funds of approximately \$268,000 paid for most breakfasts, lunches, and snacks served to Head Start children during the grant year. Contracted Head Start transportation services paid to the program's vendor, Pioneer Resources, totaled \$258,481.

Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana is required to provide a non-federal match to support the program. For the grant year ending 11/30/21, the program's non-federal share expenditures totaled \$2,304,709. The majority of the non-federal share was from the State of Michigan early childhood grants, parents and community members who worked as volunteers for the program, and local school districts that donated classroom and office space in district buildings.

The proposed budget for the next grant year ending 11/30/2022, for both Head Start and Early Head Start combined, includes the following categories and amounts:

- Personnel wages and benefits: \$4,471,832
- Out-of-Town Travel: \$30,456
- Equipment (one bus and a playground structure): \$123,345
- Supplies: \$125,625
- Contractual includes \$2,619,104 for four partner districts, \$455,015 for the bus transportation contract, and \$833,746 or other, primarily EDUStaff
- Other: \$545,215
- Total Proposed Budget: \$9,204,338

Further, additional one-time COVID-19 response funds will be spent in excess of the proposed base grant award through March 2023.

Results of the Most Recent Peer Review & Financial Audit

As a recipient of federal funds, the Muskegon Area ISD is required to adhere to strict federal performance standards of the Head Start Act. In addition to the annual self-assessment and ongoing internal monitoring procedures, federal peer reviews are conducted.

During the week of November 5, 2018, the Department of Health & Human Services sent a team to inspect the operations of Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana. The team's final report noted no areas of non-compliance or deficiencies and stated that the "program meets the requirements of all applicable HSPPS, laws, regulations, and policy requirements."

During the week of December 10, 2018, the federal government sent a second review team to conduct classroom observations using the CLASS tool measuring teacher-child interactions. Scores from this

review in the three child development domain are at or above the national median published scores for 2017-18.

During November 2021, the federal government conducted a “Focus Area 1” monitoring review of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs and found no areas of non-compliance.

In November 2021, the independent auditing firm of Brickley DeLong issued its annual audit of the financial statements of the MAISD, including Head Start operations. The auditors presented an unmodified audit report to the Board of Education. The audit of federal sources of income, also conducted by Brickley DeLong, resulted in a report with no material weaknesses and no significant deficiencies. The audit has been filed with the federal clearinghouse.

School Readiness of Head Start Children

School readiness, often called ‘Kindergarten readiness,’ is the concept relating to a child’s level of preparation and skill set as he/she enters Kindergarten. Research shows that a child’s level of ‘readiness’ at the time of Kindergarten entry is an important factor in a child’s level of success in school during the K-12 years. Preparing Head Start children for success in Kindergarten and beyond is the local Head Start program’s top priority.

Defining ‘readiness’ is not easy. Some people focus on a single indicator, such as whether a child knows the ABC’s or counts to ten or more. Prominent research encourages an approach that assesses multiple child development domains. In Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana, school readiness goals and child outcome measures are established across six core child development domains: Approaches to learning, social-emotional development, cognition & general knowledge, perceptual, motor, and physical development, language & early literacy, and English language development.

The following are critical early childhood development domains that are the focus of teaching and learning in Head Start and Early Head Start programs locally.

- **Approaches to Learning:**

This dimension relates to the child’s development of initiative, curiosity, and persistence in his/her work and play – all critical life skills and markers for success in school and in life.

- **Social and Emotional Development:**

The program helps develop children’s self-confidence, independence, ability to follow directions, manage feelings, cooperate with classmates, and self-control. Kindergarten teachers often report these are critical skills for school success.

- **Language and Literacy:**

This is a key area of development for children and emphasis in the program. A child’s ability to communicate with others is essential. The program’s curriculum dedicates much effort to developing children’s vocabulary, communication skills, emergent reading skills, alliteration, and other language and early literacy building blocks.

- **Cognition:**

These are critical years for children to develop thinking skills and learn about their world. Through such activities as counting, making patterns, sorting, comparing and measuring, exploring science and nature, and many other such activities, children develop the ability to solve problems, think critically, be imaginative, and enhance their overall knowledge.

- **Perceptual, Motor, & Physical Development:**

Children need to be growing healthy to be ready to learn. The program focuses on ensuring appropriate health and nutrition as well as helping build their gross and fine motor skill set.

Fifty-two child outcome indicators are tracked, monitored, and analyzed using an internet-based assessment tool. Data is then formally aggregated three times in the program year. Program leaders, classroom staff, and parents believe this multi-dimensional approach most effectively builds a solid foundation for children's success in school.

At the conclusion of time period three, June 2021, the following progress was made in each of the five key domains:

- **Approaches to Learning:** All seven outcome indicators in this domain had 85% or more of children meeting the expected developmental norm.
- **Social-Emotional Development:** Six of seven outcome indicators were at 85% or more children meeting the expected developmental norm.
- **Language and Literacy:** 89% of the outcome indicators in this domain had 85% or more children at or above the developmental norm.
- **Cognition:** Of the 13 indicators in this domain 6 were at 85% or more
- **Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development:** 100% of the indicators in this domain were at 85% or more

Data indicators showing the highest level of readiness included the following:

- Showing flexibility and inventiveness in thinking
- Engages in sociodramatic play
- Forms relationships with adults
- Follow directions
- Uses and appreciates books
- Retells stories
- Writes name
- Uses classification skills

Indicators presenting the largest challenges – or assessed at being the lowest percentage of children at the developmental norm:

- Children solving social problems
- Using letter-sound knowledge
- Noticing and discriminating rhyme
- Connecting numeral with their quantities
- Understanding shapes

Summary of Community Assessment Update

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the community and its residents in unprecedented ways during the 2020-21 program year. Unemployment zoomed upward in the initial days of the pandemic, but later labor shortages presented themselves as businesses struggled to find willing workers. Child care openings vanished, severely curtailing options for working families. Births in the service area, especially in Oceana County, continued their recent trend of decline.

Amid the pandemic, families were able to access considerably enhanced “safety net” support. Enhanced unemployment benefits, food assistance, stimulus payments, housing, and utility assistance were some examples of enhanced support that program staff assisted families in accessing.

Opportunities for families to take advantage of birth-to-three home visiting services remain scarce throughout the service area; the number of public pre-school 'slots' increased by 32 with a Head Start expansion award of two additional classrooms for the 2021-22 program year.

Program staff remains concerned about the continually worsening rates of child abuse and neglect, teenage pregnancy, childhood lead poisoning, and an increase in challenging behavior, a trend likely related to exposure to trauma and now the pandemic shutdowns. Such data suggests that many children throughout the service area face difficult odds in achieving their fullest development in their earliest years.

Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana Mission Statement

Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana prepares young children for success socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually by partnering with families and serving as a gateway to seamless community-based and educational services.

Philosophy

Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana promotes each child's readiness for success in school and in life by valuing these core principles:

- Research confirms that a child's ***lifelong foundation for learning*** is established during the first five years of life.
- A child's primary influence and ***most important teacher*** is the family unit living in the child's home.
 - Raising a child is an awesome responsibility that requires hard work, dedication, and nurturing.
 - Supporting families is a critical element in promoting healthy early childhood development.
- Children are unique individuals; each child's growth and development must be supported in a manner that his/her ***full potential*** can be achieved.
- High-quality, comprehensive early childhood development services are vital to preparing all children for ***school readiness and success in life***.
- A child's early education learning environment – both at home and within a classroom – should provide a ***rich array*** of group and individual activities that foster positive physical, mental, cognitive, emotional, and social development.

A ***nurturing environment*** is key to a young child's healthy development. The utilization of ***positive behavioral supports*** is a critical piece to this environment.