

# Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2023

*(December 1, 2022 – November 30, 2023)*

## 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 2023 equated to \$30,000 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 preschool 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

- 4,722 – Home visits conducted with Early Head Start families (pregnant women and families with birth-to-three children)
- 2,719 – Home visits conducted with Head Start families (families with preschool aged children)
- 35,178 – Recorded family reading hours with HS & EHS children
- 36 – Head Start and EHS foster children served
- 70%-Families receiving SNAP (food assistance)
- 8.29%- Families experiencing homelessness
- 20,255 - Free books provided to Head Start/EHS children

## Enrollment & Attendance

During the 2021-22 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.

The program has a longstanding emphasis on daily attendance. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic the program average daily attendance rates increased slightly, ending the program year with a 84.4% average daily attendance rate.

### **A summary of various enrollment statistics for the 2022-23 period follows:**

- Head Start children served: 666-full funded enrollment
- Early Head Start participants: 292
- Enrollment: 100%
- Year-end attendance rate: 84.4%
- Percent of four-year-olds in Head Start classrooms: 68%
- Percent of children served being racial minorities: 51.7%

- Children served with special needs: 16.67% Head Start, 23.08.% EHS
- Second-year or returning Head Start children: 31.95% Head Start, 39.38% EHS

2022-23 program waiting began to return to pre pandemic levels and nearly doubled over the prior program year. At the conclusion of the school year (June 2023), there were a total of 133 children on Head Start (102 children) and Early Head Start (31) waiting lists. Using county birth numbers and federal census data regarding childhood poverty, it is estimated that Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana served approximately 35% of the income-eligible children living in the service area; the local state preschool program known as Great Start Readiness serves an additional 42% 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.

Ongoing partnerships and continued advocacy efforts resulted in program-wide results remaining above state and national averages.

- 99.9% of children covered by medical insurance
- 99.7% of children assigned to a primary medical provider
- 93.31% of HS and 86.54% of EHS children were current with the state’s EPSDT schedule (age-appropriate primary health care services)
- 90% up-to-date with age-appropriate immunizations
- 95% 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
- Family Literacy Nights
- Family Fun Nights
- Conscious Discipline Social-Emotional Parenting Series
- Promote community-wide parenting initiatives
- Many referrals and partnerships with community agencies serving local families
- Regularly provide books to families

## **Transitioning Children to Kindergarten**

422 children were transitioned into Kindergarten classrooms from Head Start for the 2023-24 school year (63% of those enrolled as of June 2023). 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 \$9,743,367 from the federal government for the grant year ended 11/30/23 for base operating and technical assistance funding. USDA funds of \$519,030 paid for 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 \$372,652.

Head Start of Muskegon/Oceana is required to provide a non-federal match to support the program. For the grant year ending 11/30/23, the program's non-federal share expenditures totaled \$2,375,719. 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 11/30/2024, for both Head Start and Early Head Start combined, includes the following categories and amounts:

- Personnel wages and benefits: \$4,279,566
- Out-of-Town Travel: \$27,235
- Equipment (one Blinq vision screener and a playground structure): \$30,845
- Supplies: \$272,618
- Contractual: \$4,413,362 (includes \$2,878,979 for four partner school districts and \$834,427 EDUStaff employment.
- Other: \$264,515
- Total Proposed Budget - Direct Funding: \$10,229,002

## **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 15, 2021, the federal government conducted a "Focus Area 1" monitoring review of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The final report issued no deficiencies or findings.

During the week of October 9, 2023, the federal government conducted a "Focus Area 2" monitoring review of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The final report issued no deficiencies and one minor area of non-compliance regarding a program form, which was revised.

In November 2023, 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 2023, 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 with an overall domain average of 92%.
- **Social-Emotional Development:** Four of seven outcome indicators were at 85% or more children meeting the expected developmental norm. The overall domain average was 85%, a slight increase over the prior year.
- **Language and Literacy:** 14 of 18 outcome indicators in this domain had 85% or more of the children meeting the expected developmental normal. The overall domain average was 92%, also a slight improvement over the prior year.
- **Cognition:** Of the 13 outcome indicators in this domain 7 were at 85% (the prior year was only 5) or more with an overall domain average of 84% which was also an increase over 2022-23 year end results. .
- **Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development:** 100% of the indicators in this domain were at 85% or more. The overall domain average was 94%.

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

- Shows curiosity and motivation
- Engages in sociodramatic play
- Balancing needs and rights of self and others
- Interacts with peers
- Uses and appreciates books
- Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary
- Makes connections
- 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
- Understanding shapes
- Connecting numeral with their quantities

## Summary of Community Assessment Update

The program issued a new Community Assessment Report in 2022 in accordance with Head Start Performance Standards and an annual update in 2023. Families served by Head Start continue to face economic hardships particularly coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Assessment report findings include the following important trends:

- Births, especially in Oceana County, continue a recent trend of significant declines which impact future enrollment numbers for both Early Head Start and Head Start services.
- Data regarding family Income is rising but inflation is having a negative impact on family economic well being.
- Providers of emergency support, such as for rent assistance, food, and utility payment, are strained to meet a growing need.
- Access to primary health care and dental care remains robust in the service area.
- Free preschool slots remain plentiful in part due to the increase in State of Michigan funding for the GSRP program aimed at four year olds.
- Child abuse and neglect rates remain stubbornly high throughout the service area, well ahead of state averages.

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.