



Head Start Community Program of Morris County, Inc.

18 Thompson Avenue, Dover, NJ 07801

www.headstartmc.org

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Morristown Site (973)889-8848

2019 Self-Assessment Report & Program Improvement Plan

I. Introduction

a. Program description

Head Start Community Program of Morris County partners with families to provide comprehensive support for child development and school readiness, from prenatal to kindergarten ages, for the community's most vulnerable children. The program has a 54-year history of supporting at-risk children and families in Morris County. Our vision is to empower diverse families and strengthen communities. With the award of a second Head Start/Early Head Start grant in September 2019, we provide free child development services for a total of 333 children, predominantly dual language learners. Early Head Start services based in Dover serve a total of 106 clients (10 home-based pregnant women, 64 home-based infants and toddlers, as well as 16 current and 16 future center-based toddlers—the “future” children are being served in home-based model pending classroom



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construction). Children aged 18 months to 3 receive Early Head Start center-based services in Dover. Head Start center-based services are provided for a total of 227 children ages 3-5 at sites in Dover and Morristown (Morris View Health Care Center and Alfred Vail Elementary School).

b. Context for Self-Assessment process

Our annual Self-Assessment, examining the past program year, connects with the previous year's Program Improvement Plan to provide leadership and strategic direction toward continuous program improvement. The Self-Assessment reviewed Health and Safety, School Readiness, Management Systems, and progress on grant application goals and objectives, as well as identified areas of focus or trends, to address systemic issues and develop innovative approaches to improve quality. The context is strength-based, connecting Community Assessment and Ongoing Monitoring with management systems in all program areas. The Head Start Management Systems (Program Planning & Service System Design; Data & Evaluation; Fiscal Management; Community & Self-Assessment; Facilities and Learning Environments; Technology & information Systems; Training & Professional Development; Communication; Recordkeeping & Reporting; Human



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Resources; and Ongoing Monitoring & Continuous Improvement) provide a framework for program management, planning and oversight—including leadership and governance.

II. Methodology

a. Design of Self-Assessment and identification of participants

Our Self-Assessment began with annual Community Assessment update process. We began by gathering community stakeholders together at a Community Partners Breakfast. Participants assembled in teams, grouped by areas of expertise/interest, and were led in a focused inquiry by members of the Head Start management staff and governing body. An internally developed Community Needs Assessment instrument was used by each team to gather data. Qualitative data on community strengths, resources, service gaps, trends and unmet needs was collected at the breakfast. After the event, data was reviewed, aggregated, summarized, and analyzed to plan for program improvement. To analyze community needs and explore service gaps, quantitative data was also collected from multiple sources, including Census data and the annual Kids Count Data Center, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In addition, Head Start Community Program of Morris



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County collected outcomes data via surveys of stakeholders. Data specific to our service area was collected via the North Jersey Health Collaborative Community Health Dashboard, which provides current data about the health and wellness of the community. Additionally, the Community Partners Breakfast served as an opportunity to recruit stakeholders for the ensuing Self-Assessment.

Participants in Self-Assessment included staff members, parents, Board members, and Policy Council members. Representatives from many community agencies and government groups also participated, including NORWESCAP Head Start, United Way of Northern NJ, Dover Health Department; Zufall Health Center; Morris County Department of Human Services; Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs; Child and Family Resources (the County childcare resource and referral agency); Dover Public Schools, Rockaway Borough Public Schools, Rockaway Township Public Schools Wharton Public Schools, and the Morris School District; Morris Educational Foundation; Preschool Advantage; Morris County Office of Temporary Assistance; Family Intervention Services; Morris County Family Success Center); Cornerstone Family Programs; Homeless Solutions; Partnership for Maternal Child Health; WIC; local and state government



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officials; and local community child care centers. For Self-Assessment, participants used an internally designed instrument to facilitate collection and recording of data in the areas of Health and Safety; School Readiness; Human Resources, Leadership and Governance; and Progress on Grant Application Goals and Objectives, which included child and family engagement outcomes as well as fiscal objectives.

b. Self-Assessment time frame

Self-Assessment takes place each spring, beginning with Community Partners Breakfast, which initiates the annual update of Community Assessment. The 2019 Community Partners Breakfast was held on May 2, and served to gather data on community needs, strengths and resources from stakeholders and Head Start community partners. The event also was an opportunity to share information on our Self-Assessment process and recruit participants. Self-Assessment observations and inquiry sessions were completed during the months of May and June. During this time, participants came to Head Start sites to review documents and interview staff, Policy Council and Board members. Team leaders in each area of management collected and recorded outcomes data on key performance



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indicators. Management then analyzed and aggregated data, making recommendations for improvement planning and compiling the 2018 Self-Assessment Report and Program Improvement Plan. This document is shared with parents, Policy Council, Board and community stakeholders, and used to guide program planning during the 2019-2020 program year.

c. Data collection tools used

An internally designed self-assessment matrix was the instrument used to gather information and record data in each area. Data was captured via interviews with staff, parents, policy council and Board members; review of client files and developmental screening records; Ongoing Monitoring reports; PIR; ERSEA data; health, mental health and nutrition data; professional development records; family engagement data; and Child Plus. Quantitative and qualitative data was reviewed from multiple sources including TSGOLD; Grow NJ Kids Ratings; and CLASS/ITERS/ECERS observations. Inquiries were supported by reference to standards and documents including the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework; Head Start Program Performance Standards; NJ Birth-to-Three Early Learning



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Standards; and NJ Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, as well as the Goals and Objectives in the Head Start/Early Head Start Application.

d. Additional information used during Self-Assessment

In addition to the information outlined in c. above, the 2019 Self-Assessment process encompassed information from the prior year's Self-Assessment and Program Improvement Plan, Ongoing Monitoring Reports in all areas of management systems for the time period leading up to 2019 Self-Assessment, and data from the 2019 Community Assessment Update. Staff and parents provided anonymous feedback via surveys seeking their input. Also, the goals and objectives from the five-year grant application of Head Start Community Program of Morris County were central in conducting Self-Assessment, especially the Grant Year 4 Objectives (2018-2019).

III. Key Insights

a. Strengths of the program

Family and Community Engagement – Robust family engagement was a hallmark of the program. In terms of progress on specific family and



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community engagement goals outcomes for the 2018-2019 program year were as follows:

- 90% of families completed a Family Partnership Agreement and set a goal for the school year
- 90% of families made measurable progress toward their school-year goal
- 10% of families achieved the goal
- Parent commitment to the program was demonstrated by strong child attendance: Head Start 90.03% and Early Head Start 89.84%.
- 98% of parents participated in parent-teacher conferences.
- 90% of parents attended at least one parent education meeting.
- 88 families participated in Back-to-School Night.
- 90% of families in the center-based programs participated in home visits and 95% of home-based program families participated in group socializations at Head Start, as well as home visits.
- Engagement of fathers was particularly strong. A total of 135 participated in Breakfast with Dads event and 41 fathers attended monthly Fatherhood Initiative meetings, with 11 of those individuals attending all or nearly all meetings.



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- Family engagement in literacy activities is also a strength. Our popular Early Language and Literacy program incentivizes parent attendance at Head Start parent meetings and events. Families who attend receive a new children's book in their home language, along with a different literacy message each month.

School Readiness – As a *Grow NJ Kids* FOUR-STAR rated program under New Jersey's Quality Rating Improvement System Head Start of Morris County has demonstrated state-wide QRIS leadership. Practice-based coaching is in place for both Head Start and Early Head Start, and key outcomes for the 2018/2019 program year are noted below:

- 12% of enrolled Head Start children and 16% of enrolled Early Head Start children received inclusive, individualized disabilities services.
- Based on aggregate Teaching Strategies GOLD child assessment data, most children entered the program in the fall below or close to the bottom of widely held expectations. By winter, they tend to score in mid-range. By the completion of the school year, children are performing within targeted widely held expectations for their age groups.



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- Areas of highest growth over the course of the year were: Social-Emotional, Cognitive, and Literacy.
- Areas in need of continued support and growth are Mathematics and Language Development.

Classroom assessment instruments were used by Instrument Reliable raters to evaluate the quality of our classroom environments. These assessments guide teacher training and help to identify resources needed by the program. Assessments were conducted using the CLASS, ECERS-3, ITES-3, and T-POT, as well as *Creative Curriculum* Fidelity Tool, which evaluates the fidelity of curriculum implementation in classrooms. Key outcomes for the 2018-2019 program year were as follows:

- The Instructional Support component of CLASS has been an ongoing focus for continuous program improvement, a grant objective which we have prioritized. National Head Start averages for the domain of Instructional Support range between 2.3 and 3.71.
- For the Dover site, Instructional Support scores ranged between 3.16 and 4.23, with an average of 3.78—our highest ever, and a substantial improvement.



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- For the Morristown site, Instructional Support scores ranged between 4.16 and 4.28, with an average of 4.52—our highest ever, and a substantial improvement.
- ECERS-3 assessments were conducted for Head Start classrooms with a baseline observation in Fall and a Summative observation in Spring; a score of 5 is the bar for a high-quality program. For Dover, average subscale scores were 4.9 in Fall and 5.24 in Spring. For Morristown, average subscale scores were 5.23 in Fall and 5.42 in Spring.
- ITERS-3 assessments were conducted in the Early Head Start classrooms, with a score of 5 as the bar for a high-quality program. Baseline observation score averages (for three classrooms) were 5.33. Summative observation scores (for two classrooms—the third had aged into ECERS by the Spring of the school year) were 4.92. Areas for improvement included diapering and toileting and sanitary requirements; encouraging vocabulary and communication, positive redirection; math/number concepts; updating display materials regularly; and using books with children.
- Emerging goals included implementation of the TPOT instrument and the Creative Curriculum Fidelity Tool in our classrooms. Marked



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progress was made in these areas over the course of the school year, and continued growth in use of these tools will be part of ongoing focus as we move forward.

Data systems – A effective Ongoing Monitoring System affords regular reporting to stakeholder groups, with timelines and responsibilities for improvement plans outlined. Board and Policy Council members characterize the reporting and communication of the management team as being responsive, timely and comprehensive. We have also developed and implemented a structure for internal Ongoing Monitoring Reports, with focus on Health and Safety and School Readiness, to track outcomes, identify systemic issues, and report progress over time.

The Child Plus data management system has proven to be an effective tool in tracking outcomes and, starting this past program year, served as a real-time communication tool with parents, staff and collaborating organizations. The instant-alert feature of the system enabled Head Start of Morris County to send texts to parents, team members and partners



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regarding scheduling, cancellations, special programs and situations as needed. Parents and staff responded favorably to this feature.

Implementation of Improvements from 2018

Self-Assessment and Program Improvement Plan: Progress Update

Health, Safety and Security

- Bollards have been installed around playground at fence sections that border street or parking areas at the Dover site. Morris View site still needs updates, and we are working with the County on relocating the program to a new site.
- A new playground climbing structure, donated by the NY Jets Foundation and facilitated by United Way of Northern NJ, replaced the outdated, noncompliant structure at the Dover site. A variety of surfaces are now available to the children with the addition of fencing and safe soil testing results which extended our playground spaces.
- A system of ID badges and visitor sign in/out was put in place. All staff and regular volunteers now wear photo ID badges.



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Services for Children and Families

An Extended Care Program (ECP), funded through State Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) subsidy, was implemented in 2018/2019 to address the ongoing need for Before- and After-School care identified in through the Community Assessment process. The Annual Community Needs Assessment update points to a shortage of before- and after-school childcare, as well as a need for childcare to assist parents working non-traditional hours. Infant and toddler care is also in very short supply, as it is expensive and complex for agencies to provide due to arduous regulations and compliance standards.

- The ECP program was set up at the Dover site to provide before- and after-care to Head Start/Early Head Start children ages 30 months and up.
- It took four months for the ECP to break even, during which time the agency bore the financial impact of supporting the program. In order sustain the program, the before-school service aspect was discontinued, with its lower enrollment; some staff was laid off.
- The remaining version of the ECP, which focuses on after-school and interim care, was sustaining a small net positive income by the



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conclusion of the school year. Additional increases in funding in the FY2019 state budget will enable the program to continue in strength for 2019/2020.

Staff Credentialing

- All Home Educator staff achieved the Home Visitor CDA Credential as required.
- All Social Services staff without higher academic credentials achieved the Family Development Credential.

Organizational Capacity and Governance

- The agency's website has been updated and improved, with added connection to social media, interactive communication features, and an online application for services feature implemented.
- Key skillsets and community representation on the governing bodies has been strengthened. The Board of Directors added a CPA, attorney with Human Resources expertise, a university professor of Early Childhood Education, and a parent representative. The Policy Council president attends Board of Directors meetings to ensure ongoing



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connection and communication between the fiscal governing body and parent/community governance.

Pending Health and Safety/Systemic Issues – In January 2019, a supplemental application was made to Head Start Regional Office to apply for one-time funds to address identified facilities safety and security issues. A notice of award regarding this application was received in August 2019. Grant is to address issues at the Dover site. Funding for Morris View as not provided as the program will be moving from the Morris View site:

- Intercom system for areas of building that are not currently covered by communications devices: HS and EHS playgrounds in Dover; outdoor courtyard play area in Dover; Dover nurse's office; Dover all-purpose room; hallway outside of Rooms 1 and 2 in Dover.
- Height of fencing and gate latches at Morris View is too low; Grow NJ Kids recommendation was minimum of 48" high.
- Several doors in Dover building are deteriorated and no longer secure.



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- Multiple blind spots exist in building camera coverage for the Dover site. We also seek to improve safety and security through the addition of in-class cameras.
- Visitors walking around building are not immediately identifiable.

Technology Systems

- Phone system is outdated and a frequent source of problems. Older equipment is incompatible with current technologies.
- IT support is inadequate. The tech support that has been in place is not sufficient to meet the organization's needs.
- Communications and data management hardware (I-Pads, desktop computers, some printers, copy machines) is aging and is in need of updating/replacement.

Leadership & Governance – Suggestions were made by members of the Self-Assessment teams as follows:

- Improve onboarding process and orientation for Board of Directors. Mentorship by an existing Board member would be



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helpful to fully grasp roles and scope of Head Start mission, standards and structure.

- Members of the Board questioned the need to provide hard copies of documents which are also sent to the Board electronically. Suggestion was to ask all members to bring laptops, print their own documents, or reserve printed copies in advance, and have Head Start distribute printed copies only to those individuals who request them in advance.
- Improve Policy Council representation from the various program components and sights, including Home-Based and Morristown site. Consider a different process, such as rotating meeting locations, or providing transportation to support attendance from all areas of the county. This will become increasingly important as the agency expands to multi-site programs.

Parenting curriculum – The Revised Head Start Program Performance Standards task Head Start programs with offering an evidence-based parenting curriculum as a resource for parents. Head Start of Morris County has not yet fulfilled this requirement or developed the resources for staff



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training and implementation. The Head Start-approved parenting curriculum, *Abriendo Puertas*, has been explored. A grant application was submitted to the County of Morris to support this program for 2019, but was not funded. In order to meet standards, families are currently referred to another parenting education program in the county, sponsored by Mount Olive Child Care and Learning Center. This program supports family access to parenting curriculum with transportation, dinner and babysitting.

Human Resources - A number of systemic issues in the Management Systems area of Human Resources have been identified and addressed.

- Employee Handbook has been updated to reflect new laws and regulations.
- It was suggested that the Employee Handbook be translated into Spanish, since the majority of staff speak Spanish as a first language. This was accomplished and copies of the Handbook will be available in Spanish for those who request it.
- The Organizational Chart and roles were reviewed. It was determined that:



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- The need for a dedicated Human Resources staff member was identified. Upon the retirement of Administrative Assistant, a new position was created, with a focus on Human Resources, staff credentialing, insurance, family leave and absences, the hiring and onboarding process. An Office Manager who has a bachelor's degree in Human Resources was hired to manage these tasks, and oversee staff in the Administrative Assistant or Receptionist roles.
- It was recommended that the position of Fiscal and Facilities Manager be split into two separate roles. Tasks for these positions were reviewed and divided. A bilingual, degreed Facilities Manager was recruited and hired, and will oversee building and grounds issues, and supervise custodial and kitchen staff at all sites.
- Fiscal staff transition will incorporate succession planning. During staff transition period, fiscal duties assumed by executive director, with the support of interim consultants, helped to identify tasks and timelines which are part of fiscal officer's responsibility. The transition brought clarity and



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interim consultants were able to streamline and organize accounting and task structure.

c. Progress of the program in meeting its goals and objectives

Objective: *Update Fiscal Policies and Procedures* (deferred from Grant Year 3). The current year is Grant Year 5, and the organization's Fiscal Policies and Procedures were updated to reflect the new Head Start Program Performance Standards, the Head Start Act (as amended in 2007) and the Administration for Children and Families Regulations 42 CFR.

Several Family & Community Engagement goals were addressed in ***Strengths of the program*** above; progress met or exceeded grant goals as noted. Self-Assessment did identify an area for improvement as connections and materials to serve families whose home language is other than English or Spanish. Literacy materials are ordered and provided in families' home languages and classroom print and resources are also provided to support home languages of all families in the program.

Goal: *Form additional partnerships with community agencies that meet family needs.* Additional partnerships formed include a collaboration with



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Speech and Hearing Associates, as well as The Optical Academy. Both agencies provide free or low-cost health services that directly benefit our families. A new partnership with the Interfaith Food Pantry has also provided snacks for the preschool programs and for the Extended Care Program. Ongoing, continually developing collaborations available through the Town of Dover, and community groups such as *Connecting Dover* and *Shaping Dover*, and the *Morris County Council for Young Children*, provide a wide array of resources to support family health, education and well-being. Increased collaborations with Lead Educational Agencies (Wharton Public Schools and Morris School District) provide benefits for Head Start families and staff, and helped the Head Start of Morris County to build capacity. A new partnership with Dover Public Schools for Preschool Education Expansion Aid will begin in October 2019.

Unique Organizational Goals – Year 2-5 grant objectives in this area have been marked by steady progress, despite setbacks presented by factors outside of agency control. Head Start of Morris County has continued to collect data on the need for Head Start and Early Head Start services, with average waiting lists of more than 200 children, and Community Assessment estimating approximately 1,453 children in Morris County who were Head



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Start eligible in the past year. Approximately 20% of these children received services. Data on children's achievement and feedback from Head Start families continue to confirm that full-day programs serve children and families better than half-day programs. The agency's application and award for additional Federal Head Start and Early Head Start grant funding represents a significant move forward in addressing unmet need in the community.

With the advent of Preschool Expansion in New Jersey, Head Start of Morris County was part of pre-k collaboration applications with Wharton Borough Public Schools and the Morris School District. An additional classroom in Dover, constructed in existing space by converting a library room that was underutilized, was created in August 2018, with approval by regulatory agencies. The extra classroom enables the agency to lower class sizes to meet NJ Preschool Implementation Guidelines. Furthermore, a diligent search for additional space has been and continues to be part of the agency's ongoing work. At the Dover site, three classrooms were converted into two larger rooms to facilitate a pre-k collaboration with Dover Public Schools, beginning October 1, 2019.



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IV. Recommended Areas for Program Improvement (Program Improvement Plan)

- a) Upgrade and modernize phone system.
- b) Through supplemental grant award for safety and security at Dover site, install intercom system for areas of building that are not currently covered by communications devices: HS and EHS playgrounds in Dover; outdoor courtyard play area in Dover; Dover nurse's office; Dover all-purpose room; hallway outside of Rooms 1 and 2 in Dover.
- c) Through supplemental grant award for safety and security at Dover site, extend camera coverage system to cover blind communal space areas and cameras to classroom spaces.
- d) Develop additional outdoor playground space at Dover site, purchasing gross motor play equipment for use in second Head Start playground area approved by Office of Licensing.
- e) Through supplemental grant award for safety and security at Dover site, install 6-foot fencing near EHS playground in Dover (Chestnut Street). Permit will be required.
- f) Develop a system of temporary ID badges for visitors.



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- g) Seek proposals for IT support and engage the services of a tech consultant who is well-versed in meeting the needs of nonprofit community service agencies.
- h) Update and replace communications and data management hardware (I-Pads, desktop computers, some printers, copy machines) to the extent that funds permit. Seek to periodically review inventory and update gradually.
- i) Support staff recruitment and retention efforts by providing a number of free child care slots for staff, to the extent that is possible given organizational capacity and resources.
- j) Ensure that key administrative staff members are trained in HR regulations, especially administration of FMLA.
- k) Closely monitor onboarding, training and ongoing professional development of new staff to ensure that high levels of staff competency are maintained consistently under the new as well as the existing Head Start/Early Head Start grant.
- l) Implement system to track and recognize staff service anniversaries.
- m) Develop a system for onboarding and orientation of New Board of Directors members which includes mentoring by current Board



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members and Governance/Head Start Program Performance Standards training early in new members' tenure.

- n) Reduce reliance on paper materials and documents for Board meetings and seek to provide materials in electronic format whenever possible.
- o) Review Policy Council participation for other sites and offer additional supports, such as taxi service reimbursement, or rotate meetings, for parent membership in Policy Council.
- p) Continue to seek development of resources to implement a research-based parenting curriculum, such as *Abriendo Puertas*. Once resources are identified, plan for training staff and offering the curriculum to parents during the following program year.
- q) Seek resources to implement Fatherhood Initiative at Morristown sites.
- r) Update succession plan for management staff positions, including monthly timetables/task lists for each position.