

Letter from the Director

Dear Community,

As I reflect on the 2023-24 school year, I am reminded of the strength and resilience of our staff, child care providers, families and children. Staff have pitched in as others left positions and gone unfilled for long periods of time. Parents have come to the table with ideas and support for the program. Child care providers have fully invested in the children they serve through high quality care, home visits, and parent teacher conferences. Children are learning friendship skills and learning to regulate their emotions. We have bolstered our community outreach to help us enroll children and provide services. Each person has a vital role to play and we cannot do this work without the support of each and every one.

During the 2023-24 school year we added an EHS Coordinator, who will be focusing on building our Parent Engagement support. We have also improved our health results by encouraging families to get the recommended health services for their children.

It has been a challenge to stay fully enrolled, but we have been able to reach this goal monthly due to improving our active recruitment opportunities and engaging all staff in this plan. Parent/Family Engagement has been a struggle for us since COVID, but we are making strides in getting and keeping parents engaged. We had 22 families attend our first Parent Committee Meeting/Event this fall.

We have also added Care Management Meetings with each of our partners to investigate each child's strengths, interests, needed services, health needs, transition needs, and assessment and IFSP/IEP goals. These Care Management Meetings have helped identify needs and provide additional supports for children and families countywide.

We have also hired a Mental Health Consultant to work directly with each provider. He meets with programs often and provides support in the areas of Social and Emotional Support. We also contract with a local Therapist who provides observations and feedback to every EHS program 3 times per year.

Sincerely,

Ginelle Boyle

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Director of Early Childhood Services

Program Snapshot

Serving 64 infants and toddlers birth through age 4

Family Child Care Provider Partners

Bright Beginnings - Sturgis - 7 children
Little Fawn's Daycare - Burr Oak - 9 children
Wee Kids Daycare - Sturgis - 9 children
Playschool on Fifth- Burr Oak- 3 children

Center Child Care Provider Partners

Christine's Early Learning Center - Centreville - 8 children
New Hope Assembly Building Blocks Preschool and Child Care Center - Three Rivers - 4 children
Little Trojans Early Head Start -Sturgis - 8 Children
It Takes a Village-Constantine-4 Children

Home Visitation

Countywide - 12 children

We made every effort to recruit new child care provider partners and continue to look for additional family child care providers. We are looking for 2 additional partners.

EHS-CCP Funding 2023-24

REVENUES 202	2023-24
Grant Revenue	1,921,694
Non-Federal Share	0
TOTAL	1,921,694

Expenditures	
Personnel and Fringe	\$1,146,072
Out of Town Travel	\$0
Equipment	\$0
Supplies	\$27,256
Contractual	\$629,041
Other + In-Direct	\$27,860
Non-Federal Share	\$80,000
Total	\$1,921,694

Proposed Budgets 2024-25

	FEDERAL	NON-FEDERAL*
Personnel and Fringe	\$1,125,920	\$0
Out of Town Travel	\$0	\$0
Equipment	\$0	\$0
Supplies	\$27,256	\$0
Contractual	\$629,041	\$0
Other	\$27,860	\$0
Indirect	\$80,000	\$0
Total	\$1,966,854	\$0

*The St. Joseph County ISD was approved for a waiver of the non-Federal share match by the Office of Head Start.

Enrollment

2023-24 Enrollment Data

Cumulative Enrollment	94 Children	
Enrollment by Age	Number	Percent
Under 1 year	6	5%
1 year old	14	14%
2 years old	28	28%
3 years old	46	47%

Enrollment by race and ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	Non- Hispanic
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	2%
Black or African American	0%	3%
White	24%	81%
Biracial/Multi-racial	1%	8%
Other	0%	0%

Enrollment by eligibility category			
	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-24
Income at or below 100% of the federal poverty line	66%	39%	24%
Public Assistance (TANF, SSI, SNAP*)	8%	40%	60%
Foster care	22%	17%	13%

Homeless	3%	3%	1%
Eligibility based on another type of need	0%	0%	0%
Incomes between 100% and 130% of the federal poverty line	1%	1%	0%

As the program continues to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, gains were made with enrollment. In 2020-2021, 64 children were enrolled and in 2022-2023, 77 children were enrolled. Additionally, the program saw a significant shift in how families were determined eligible. In April of 2022, the Office of Head Start gave guidance to programs that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits would be considered public assistance under the Head Start Act. This allowed programs to determine a child's eligibility with SNAP benefits and made it easier for families to complete the eligibility process. From the data table above, the program moved from 3 percent of children determined eligible under public assistance in 2021-2022 to 40 percent of children. This option has streamlined the process for many families. In 2024 we participated in an enrollment reduction in order to increase wages and improve our program. We are now serving 64 children.

The continued challenge has been to recruit child care provider partners for the program. This was promoted in many ways such as calling licensed child care providers, talking with the state regarding new providers opening, and promoting social media posts and ads to get new partners on board. One change that supported continued enrollment was opening a classroom in Sturgis in June 2023. The room serves 8 infants and toddlers with 2 teachers. We are also engaging with our local community foundation to help build child care capacity in the county. We hope to recruit 2 new child care providers by June 2025.

The program continued to recruit and enroll to fill the open spots through county celebrations, family events, open houses and they continue to distribute information to families.

Program Goals

In August of 2023 the program continued pursuing goals for the program for the five year project period. The goal areas include:

1. To ensure families have the tools needed for involvement and engagement in the Early Head Start program and after they exit the program.
2. To meet and maintain full enrollment at 97% monthly per the Head Start Performance Standards.

Some of the progress made towards these goals in 2023-2024 were:

- In October 2024, EHS held their 2nd Parent Committee Engagement event since March 2024 and we went from having 1 parent show up in April to having 22 parents show up in October with 41 kids present. We will continue to meet families where they are at to increase parent engagement.
- We have 5 parents and 1 community member serving on the Policy Council for the 2024-25 school year.
- We have met full enrollment every month since April 2024.

Accountability and Financial Audit

ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW AND SELF-ASSESSMENT
Priority 1: Increase percentage of male engagement • Improve in data collection and implementation of male involvement activities
Priority 2: Improve family engagement • Strengthen the parent committee and parent to parent connections
Priority 3: Support children in foster care • Develop approaches that support the foster and biological families
FINANCIAL AUDIT
No findings

Health Services

In the school year 2023-24, the SJCISD noticed steady improvements in the health data. The percentage of children who are up-to-date on well-child checks according to the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic Treatment (EPSDT) schedule has increased from 42 at the start of enrollment to 72 at the end of enrollment. Despite the fact that a pediatrician in the area where most children would be seen was out of the office, the families made efforts to find a replacement medical home and the numbers did not decline as a result of that impact. Immunizations were another area where the staff observed progress. The program saw 59 of children complete their appropriate vaccines at the start of enrollment, which increased to 64 at the end of enrollment.

One area that needs improvement is oral health. While we saw an increase from 43% to 56% during the school year, only 56% of children are up-to-date on dental checks. Families were reporting that it was a struggle to find a dentist that would see their young children, and the ones that take younger children would schedule appointments far out. The program provided dentist information that accepted new patients, Medicaid, and were within 25 miles of Centreville. With this information, the staff hope to see progress for the next school year.

The program has also continued the Health Services Advisory Committee, which meets at least twice a year with community members involved in health care. This has aided in the communication of information between the EHS program and the community. With these strides seen over the last year, EHS will continue to monitor and improve the health service area.

Parent Involvement and Engagement

The Early Head Start program through the ISD began in 2015. In these years, the program has continued to work on parent involvement and engagement. The pandemic of COVID-19 created some barriers to this and a resulting effect. These lasting impacts continue to drive the program to shift and problem solve on how to best support the children and families in the program. Staff are supporting families to help them feel connected and involved.

Two of the objectives from the program goals focus on family engagement, including families creating and accomplishing their own goals and increased involvement and engagement. In 2023-24, 61 percent (up from 56% last year) of the families completed their goal. The goal by next school year is to have at least 65% percent of the families completing at least one goal. Part of this plan includes creating goals that are attainable in one school year, which may be a part of a larger goal. Examples of some goals are to own their own home, getting their GED or driver's license, and building credit and a savings account. This process may take more than one year, depending on their circumstances. The Family Advocates and Home Visitor will support the family on identifying goals and actions steps that could be accomplished within a school year. As a team, the staff provide the families with resources and tools to work on achieving their goals. Having something to work towards allows them to feel encouraged to keep striving for more.

Data that was observed for 2023-24 program was that over 50% percent of the families participated in their child's screening and assessment. This was completed through home visits and parent teacher conferences. Parents and caregivers learn about their child's progress and development. During this process the EHS staff and families are able to communicate effectively as both sides provide input on how to support the child and family's needs. Program staff and partners continue to encourage parent participation in their child's education and want parents to feel welcome and involved in giving their input.

A key feature of the Early Head Start child care program is supporting families with childcare. It is a challenge to find full year, full day child care. In St. Joseph County, for every one child care

spot, there are almost 3 children waiting. Families need to secure care before taking a job. Michigan completed a Child Care study and found that St. Joseph County is a child care desert.

At the beginning of enrollment for the 2023-24 school year, 32% families were not employed. At the end of enrollment, that was reduced to only 14% families. EHS staff continue and partners to work on recruiting children and providers to give the children in the community opportunities to attend quality child care programs.

One of the goals EHS has focused on this past school year has been male involvement in the children's lives. While some fathers are involved, EHS wanted to create an intentional effort to make any male role model in the child's life feel welcome and included to participate in the different aspects of Early Head Start. The baseline data collected for the 2023-24 school year is: the highest percentage of fathers (28%) participated in the child development services, followed by 24% in family assessment; 24% in family goal setting; 1.4% in program governance; and 2.8% in parenting education workshops. The plan for the 2023-2024 school year is to explore avenues to increase fatherhood/male engagement in the program and improve the data collection.

The program has also been working on hosting quality family events where parents/caregivers can bring their children. This year, the staff hosted a 2nd Annual Touch-a-Truck event that brought in many community partners to give children and parents a positive experience. There were all kinds of vehicles from fire trucks, buses, classic cars, tractors, etc. Children were able to see them up close and climb on if they wanted. This was one of the most well attended events. The program plans to continue to work on this area and further encourage parent participation, especially targeting male engagement.

Finally, the program has been working on increasing parent participation in the Policy Council and re-launching the Parent Committee. This past school year, parents participated in the Policy Council continuously and child care was provided. Despite many efforts to get parents involved in the Parent Committee, there was no interest in participating. This has been one of the many residual impacts of COVID-19. In the spring of 2023, an EHS Coordinator was hired to work on coordination of family services and to support the structure of family engagement. This position allows the program to focus on the planning and coordination of these important features. In October, we kicked off the Parent Committee for the new school year and had a huge turnout. We had 22 parents and 41 kids at the event. Parents met while kids worked on a fall craft and then dinner and family photos were taken.

School Readiness

School readiness includes three foundational components: ensuring children are ready to go to school, that their adults at home are prepared to support them, and the school is able to meet them where they are at while promoting their continued growth.

Early Head Start works with families to ensure that every child's physical health,

emotional health and developmental needs are met. Children have to be healthy, have their basic needs met, and feel safe in order to learn.

The Early Head Start team, families and partners work together to ensure that children receive high quality educational experiences that prepare them for success later in school. This is done in very specific ways. Parents are their child's first teacher. They collaborate with early education providers to complete screenings and plan lessons based on their child's specific needs. Providers assess children quarterly. They meet with parents at least four times a year to go over that data to discuss their child's development and determine goals for the child together to help the child continue to grow. Providers implement the High Scope Curriculum and Conscious Discipline. Both are brain-based research tools that assist them in providing children with rich experiences that build skills and self regulation.

Providers had the opportunity this past year to receive training on COR, Child Plus, and Family Engagement . The family engagement training was supported later in the year by staff receiving training specific on male engagement and our Fall 2024 kickoff event included 27% of male adults participating. The program will be tracking male involvement more closely in the following months to see if our data reflects these efforts, as described in the Parent Involvement and Engagement section above. Two providers received coaching on lesson planning and the program worked together towards strengthening this skill. Providers received professional development in January of 2024 to support continued growth in lesson planning for infants and toddlers.

In addition to coaching and professional development to support high quality care, EHS uses a program assessment tool to assist providers in analyzing their program and setting goals based on the environment, their daily schedule, adult and child interactions, curriculum fidelity and assessment. This year, all providers received a 3.92 or higher (out of 5) on the program assessment tool. The program will continue to use this tool for all new providers annually until they reach a 4.0, but will shift providers that have maintained that score for at least 3 years to every two years. Plans for this school year include adding the Conscious Discipline rubric to assess fidelity to Conscious Discipline and adult and child interaction with goals and coaching as part of this process. This information is utilized to plan future professional development opportunities, for the entire program and individually.