Delaware Head Start
State Collaboration Office

Needs Assessment
2009

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Delaware Department of Education

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The following is a summary of the key findings from the Delaware Head Start Collaboration Office’s 2009 Needs Assessment. The full report and technical appendices is available at the Collaboration Office’s website (www.doe.k12.de.us/infosuites/students_family/hs/about.shtml).

Executive Summary

In the Fall of 2008, the Delaware Head Start Collaboration Office, located at the Delaware Department of Education, contracted with the University of Delaware to conduct an assessment of the collaboration needs of Delaware’s 13 Head Start/Early Head Start programs and Early Childhood Assistance Programs (ECAPs). This assessment was required by the federal Head Start Act, as amended in December 2007. Delaware elected to include the ECAPs in the assessment for two reasons: 1) the state’s small size, with a network of providers and technical assistance organizations that is more interconnected than in larger states; and 2) because ECAPs are mandated under state law to follow the Head Start Performance Standards.

The needs assessment involved several methods and examined a number of priority areas identified by the Head Start Act. First, programs were asked to complete a survey designed by a national committee of state Collaboration Office Directors representing each region. This survey examined programs’ strengths and needs related to collaboration. Second, program information and key reports relevant to the 13 Delaware programs were reviewed. Finally, expert feedback was sought to interpret the information gained from the first two sources and to identify additional needs and strengths. The Head Start Outcomes Framework was used as a foundation during the planning process for Delaware needs assessment.

The key findings of this assessment, presented by priority area, are as follows:

Global Strengths and Needs

The changes in the revised Head Start Act reflect small changes in program requirements and collaboration expectations in most priority areas. However, some priority areas include substantial changes that have major impacts that programs still need to navigate. It is not surprising then, that identified needs outweigh strengths at both global and priority area levels. The should not be seen as reflection of program quality, but rather a reflection of the fact that programs, as well as the state Head Start Collaboration and ECAP offices, are still in the process of responding to the changes in the Head Start Act.

Global Strengths:

- Both Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) programs and Early Childhood Assistance Programs (ECAPs) appear to be resourceful in meeting the needs of families and children and are committed to the spirit of local and state collaboration. Lack of time and resources often limit programs’ abilities to collaborate, particularly at the state level.
- These strengths are reflected in how well programs perform on monitoring visits, in child outcomes, and in programs’ abilities to make linkages to connect families with key resources and referrals to support families and meet their needs, even though formal collaboration agreements may not always be in place.
Global Needs:

- The major need that cuts across a number of priority areas (e.g., Homelessness Services, Child Care, Welfare/Child Welfare, Community Services, Partnering with Local Education Agencies) relates to meeting the new full day/full year service definitions in the revised Head Start Act. The expansion of full day from 6 to 8 hours to over 8 hours means that:
  - Programs will need to gather new information about the number of families in need of full-day/full-year services.
  - The array of program options and services will need to be reviewed to identify possible enhancements to meet the extended definition and possible increased need.
  - Existing partnerships may need to be enhanced, or new ones developed, to meet program service gaps related to child care, community services, and a variety of other areas.

- Another need that crosses priority areas relates to outreach to other agencies around conducting professional development for program staff. Programs may benefit from help other agencies in the community could provide around three areas:
  - Understanding the available services offered by these agencies;
  - Strategies these agencies use to provide for the needs of families;
  - How HS/EHS programs and ECAPs can most appropriately/effectively meet the needs of the families they serve.

Needs and Strengths By Priority Area

Health Care: Needs: Family representation on program Health Advisory Committees and helping families get transportation to appointments are the areas programs identified as the most important issues. Programs might also benefit from assistance related to immunizations, linking children to dental homes, and helping undocumented families access health services (and likely other community services as well).

Services for Children Experiencing Homelessness: Needs: Given the introduction of McKinney-Vento homelessness services requirements in the revised Head Start Act, programs appear to need assistance regarding:

- Locating and/or accessing data about the needs of homeless children and families.
- Increasing enrollment levels of homeless children and families to meet increased expectations under the revised Head Start Act.
- Developing relationships with agencies and organizations that serve families and children who are homeless or address homelessness issues at community level, including developing closer relationships with McKinney –Vento liaisons in local school districts.

Strengths: A strength of HS/EHS programs and ECAPs in this area is their willingness to align policies, procedures, and programming to meet the McKinney-Vento requirements.
**Welfare/Child Welfare: Needs:** Given the higher expectations in the Head Start Act related to welfare/child welfare, the number of families that would potentially benefit from a variety of welfare/child welfare services, and programs’ reported low levels of collaboration with welfare/child welfare agencies, there may be need for support around relationship development in this area. Support for families moving into employment, experiencing domestic violence, and foster care and adoptive families may be particular areas of focus. Also, more data are needed on different populations (e.g., number of foster families) to better understand the level of need in program service areas.

**Child Care: Needs:** Needs in this area center around the challenge of meeting the new full day/full year requirements in the revised Head Start Act. Almost all of these are captured in the global needs section. Additional needs include:
- Aligning policies and practices with other service providers.
- Developing ways of effectively sharing information about children who are served by more than one agency.

**Strengths:** The extent of relationships with child care providers appears to be a strength in this area. These relationships will be important assets as programs work to meet the new full day/full year requirements.

**Family Literacy Services: Needs:** The primary need for this priority area appears to be for assistance around helping programs understand and access resources related to family literacy and library programs.

**Services for Children with Disabilities: Needs:** There are several needs in this priority area as a result of changes to the Head Start Act:
- Programs would benefit from developing or enhancing collaborative recruitment efforts with agencies serving children with disabilities and may need support in this area.
- Programs might benefit from assistance related to developing effective procedures for providing early intervening services to children with disabilities prior to eligibility determinations by appropriate agencies.
- At the systems level, there also appears to be a need for assistance to facilitate quicker responses to program referrals for evaluation.

**Strengths:** The majority of programs have local agreements with Local Education Agencies or Part C providers to coordinate services for children with disabilities.

**Community Services Needs:** There are two needs specific to this priority area:
- Programs may need support to enhance relations with other community organizations in order to strengthen support for families.
- Programs may benefit from support that would help them maximize the use of community organizations and businesses as sources of in-kind resources and volunteers.
Partnering with Local School Districts for Head Start Transition and Alignment with K-12

**Needs:** The higher expectations for transition in the revised Head Start Act create several needs for programs:

- All programs have transition processes, but these are not as formal and data driven as needed under the revised requirements.
- Transition processes also are not at a stage that promotes the expected level of alignment between preschool and kindergarten.
- Specific state-level efforts may be needed to strengthen relationships between programs and local school districts and to enhance transition procedures to meet the new requirements.

**Professional Development: Needs:** There are several needs related to the new professional development requirements:

- To meet the new Bachelor’s degree requirements for teachers, programs will need to work on strengthening relationships with 4-year colleges. An important aspect of this work will be developing/creating access to necessary degree programs that can be completed outside of the regular work day (e.g., evening and on-line courses, self-paced content).
- More program teachers will need to take advantage of these 4-year programs to meet the new requirements of the Head Start Act.
- More Assistant Teachers will also need to pursue relevant programs leading to required credentials.
- Programs will also need to enhance outreach to community organizations to provide professional development opportunities for support staff who work with families, and staff will need to pursue these opportunities.
- The Head Start Collaboration and ECAP offices need to work to coordinate the efforts of the state Head Start Training and Technical Assistance office and the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood to efficiently provide professional development programming that meets the needs of programs and staff.

**Strengths:** There are also several strengths in this area:

- Programs have good relationships with 2 year community colleges. These relationships have helped programs meet educational and professional development requirements under the previous version of the Head Start Act.
- Programs appear resourceful in securing community resources to provide for professional development activities.
- Two important new system-level strengths have recently emerged that show great promise in delivering quality professional development opportunities to the entire state early care and education community:
  - The state-based training and technical assistance system for Head/Early Head Start programs developed early in 2008.
  - The Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood developed in late 2008. The Institute brings together myriad resources related to professional development for the early care and education community and is designed to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach to early childhood.
professional development in Delaware and build a system of connected technical assistance to providers.

Other Assessment Topics

Alignment of Program Curricula with State Standards and Outcomes: Needs: The primary need in this area is for curriculum mapping work for program curricula for children ages 0-3 years.

Strengths: Extensive curricula mapping that has been done to date for the curriculum for children ages 4-5 years is a definite strength. Also, the state’s commitment to assessing outcomes and its decision to apply the same curricula and outcomes standards to both HS/EHS programs and ECAPs are positives as well.

Migrant Population and Services: Needs: With the decision by Telamon to relinquish the Migrant Head Start grant, the major need in this area is to find an effective way to meet the needs of migrant families and children who been served by that program.
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