

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Head Start Act (as amended December 12, 2007) requires each Head Start Collaboration Office (HSSCS) to conduct a needs assessment of Head Start and Early Head Start grantees. The assessment must include areas of coordination, collaboration, alignment of services, and alignment of curriculum and assessments used in Head Start programs with the Head Start Performance Standards, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework and, as appropriate, Georgia Early Learning Standards.

The purpose of the Needs Assessment is to develop a strategic plan for Head Start in Georgia that will best serve and support the interests of Head Start. The shared goal is to promote grantee's success in serving our children and families. The Head Start Needs Assessment Survey Template developed by a national work group coordinated by the Office of Head Start was used. Some revisions were made in order to meet the unique needs of Head Start in Georgia.

The Georgia Head Start Needs Assessment is organized around eight HSSCO national priorities and additional content areas as required by the Head Start Act of 2007 and includes Head Start/Pre-K partnership development.

### **Head Start in Georgia**

Georgia has a total of 30 Head Start Grantees. Of these grantees, 19 have only Head Start Programs, two grantees only serve Early Head Start, and 11 have both Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Approximately 20% of the 28,100 children served in Georgia Head Start programs are located in the 13 Metro Atlanta Counties. Of the 30 Grantees in Georgia, the list of those participating in the survey follows:

#### **Participating Grantees**

Clarke County School District

Enrichment Services, Inc.

Community Development Institute Head Start Serving Fulton County Early Head Start

CSRA Economic Opportunity Authority

YMCA Early Childhood Development Company, LLC

Family Resource Agency of North Georgia

Jasper County Board of Education

Randolph County Board of Education Head Start

Baldwin County Child & Family Development Center

Economic Opportunity for Savannah-Chatham County Area, Inc.

Coastal Georgia Area CAA, Inc.

Southwest Georgia Community Action Council, Inc.

Tallatoona CAP, Inc.  
Easter Seals of North Georgia  
REACH SERVICES, INC.  
Concerted Services, Inc.  
Ninth District Opportunity, Inc.  
Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers  
Middle Georgia Community Action Agency, Inc.  
Community Action for Improvement, Inc.  
Washington County NB & PW Club, Inc. Head Start/Georgia Pre-K Program  
Fort Valley State University head Start  
McIntosh Trail ECDC  
CLAYTON COUNTY CSA INC.  
Emanuel County Early Head Start

### **Overview of the process**

The Georgia Head Start Needs Assessment was distributed to Georgia Head Start directors through survey monkey beginning October 27, 2008 and ending December 5, 2008. Twenty-five of the 30 Head Start Grantees (83.3%) responded to the survey. Prior to the survey process, the survey was distributed as an electronic file so that the directors could work with their staff in consolidating the responses to the survey. One survey was sent as a fax prior to the electronic survey. The results of the survey were summarized and the information was presented to the Georgia Head Start Association for review on January 13, 2009. As a result, the Georgia Head Start Association appointed a Strategic Planning Committee to develop work plans around the areas identified. The committee will bring a plan to the Georgia Head Start Association for review and further development.

### **Summary**

A review of each survey area, a complete copy of the survey and individual responses is included. Appendix 1 includes the responses while Appendix 2 lists each specific comment response. A review of the responses indicated that several areas in need of attention.

#### **Challenges:**

- Lack of working relationships with agencies providing services for homelessness, specifically with the Title 1 Director and the McKinney-Vento Liaison.
- Lack of working relationships with agencies supporting family literacy specifically Even Start, the U. S. Department of Education Title 1 Part A Family Literacy museums or public libraries. Several

direct responses indicated that “families in crisis are not motivated to participate in literacy programs.”

- Obtaining timely evaluations of children with disabilities and Response To Intervention (RTI) procedures
- For the most part, partnerships with LEAs are working well, but a few clarifications need to be made regarding requirements, enrollment selection and priorities.
- Alignment of curricula and assessment with LEAs
- Need more on-line courses , access to professional development, the ability to provide release time to staff, and assistance in transference of institutional credits
- Further understanding, development, and implementation of Head Start/Pre-K blended programs

**Strengths:**

- Head Start grantees report that they have good working relationships with the LEAs in their communities
- Although there are no formal agreements with community agencies, Head Start programs exchange information on a regular basis
- There is a willingness to work with Georgia Pre-K in order to provide services for more three year old children and comprehensive services to four year olds
- Grantees feel that they are doing an excellent job of incorporating family literacy into program policies and practices and are establishing literacy partnerships with community providers and parents
- Georgia grantees report a high degree of involvement with agencies providing services for children with disabilities and with school systems
- Grantees are successfully sharing information and are engaged in working with law enforcement, providers of substance prevention and treatment, domestic violence prevention and treatment, and emergency services
- All reporting grantees indicate that they have a working relationship with LEAs regarding transitioning children from Head Start to kindergarten.

The following numbered areas include a summary of responses and some of the common comments provided by the participating grantees. They are paraphrased in this section. Exact responses are provided in Appendix 2.

**1. Health Care**

Eleven of the grantees (45.8%) reported that they had collaborative agreements and shared resources with agencies that conduct mental health screenings. Eight (33.3%) indicated they worked with these agencies and four reported that they exchanged information and referrals. Only one reported that they had no relationship or contact.

Nine grantees (36%) reported that they shared resources and had agreements with Medical home providers, dental home providers for treatment and care, local agencies providing mental health

prevention and treatment and state agencies providing mental health prevention and treatment services. However, five (20%) reported that they had no working relationship with state agencies providing mental health prevention and treatment services.

Six grantees (24%) indicated they had agreements and shared resources with WIC and two (8%) reported no relationship or contact.

Some of the responses indicate that grantees have partnership agreements with local agencies including Boards of Education, Babies Can't Wait, and Family Connections and there are active Health Advisory Committees. Some grantees have successfully connected the immunization process with recruiting and enrollment. Many have working relationships with local health departments.

Grantees reported that some of the challenges include locating dentists who will accept Medicaid payments, parent refusals for care, obtaining and maintaining Medicaid eligibility, the lack of dental providers who will treat young children and the availability of pediatric dental providers. In addition it was reported that it was difficult to locate other providers (especially in rural areas that parent follow up was problematic, and obtaining the results of lead screening was a challenge. Other challenges identified included coordinating Response to Intervention (RIT), maintaining medical coverage and receiving health records for foreign born children, and transportation to appointments.

These findings indicate that, although there is more work to be done around sharing resources and having partnership agreements across local and state agencies, there is a significant need to improve relationships with state agencies that provide mental health and treatment services.

## **2. Services for Children Experiencing Homelessness**

Georgia Head Start Grantees seem to be engaged in referring and exchanging information with organizations and service providers involved with homelessness. Twelve grantees (48%) reported that they share information and refer families to local agencies and 11 (44%) reported referring and exchanging information with local housing agencies and planning groups. It is extremely significant that 15 grantees (65.2%) indicate that they do not have a working relationship with the Title 1 Director and (52%) do not have a working relationship with a local McKinney-Vento liaison. Grantees also seem to have no difficulty in entering into agreements with publically funded preschools regarding enrollment and selection criteria or coordinating with LEAs regarding outreach and support efforts for children experiencing homelessness.

Georgia grantees report favorably ( from 47.8%-80%) that there is no difficulty in aligning the program definition of homelessness with the Act implementing policies and procedures to prioritize and identify homeless children, allowing enrollment will waiting for required documents and conducting training with community partners. However, 15 grantees (72.5%) report either some difficulty or difficulty in obtaining homeless data to inform the annual community assessment.

Some of the responses indicate that it is somewhat difficult to identify homelessness since many homeless families are living with relatives and, therefore meet the homeless definition. Grantees are connecting families to homeless shelters and housing authorities. Those grantees housed in community action agencies are able to utilize services provided by CAP. They report working with LEAs, DFCS, and faith-based organizations and on community task forces.

Challenges are in providing transportation and the limited access of emergency housing in rural communities. Several report that it is difficult to determine families who are living with relatives by choice rather than by necessity. The length of time for the housing application process is also challenging. Several grantees indicated that they were unaware of the role of the Title 1 Director and intend to pursue a relationship.

### **3. Welfare/Child Welfare**

Grantees reported that they have agreements and coordination with services and networks providing support to foster and adoptive families, child welfare agencies, employment and training and labor services agencies, and the TANF agency. Twelve grantees (48%) report they had either no relationship or simple referral or information exchange with Economic and Community Development Councils. Conversely, 13 (52%) reported that they had cooperation and agreements with same. This split was also evident in working with the Children' Trust. Eleven (55%) reported little or no relationship with the Children's Trust and nine (45%) reported cooperation and collaborative agreements.

Six grantees (27.3%) reported that it is very difficult to be involved in state level planning and policy development while sixteen (72.8%) reported either no difficulty or somewhat difficult. On the whole, Georgia grantees indicated that they were able to obtain information and data for assessment and planning, work with TANF to target recruitment for TANF recipients and Employment Training and support, implement procedures to insure children in the welfare system are prioritized for enrollment implement local interagency partnership agreements, exchanging information and resources with other service providers regarding family/child assistance services, and share training and technical assistance opportunities .

Grantees responses about what is working well in this area include working relationships with Court Appointed Special Advocates, DFCS, Community Action Agencies, Adult Education programs, and Georgia Strengthening Families.

Long waiting periods for services, (TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid), obtaining services for children and families not eligible for DFCS or other programs due to their immigration status, parent unemployment (due to motivation, skill level ), limited funding, lack of community awareness of areas of genuine family need, and parents inability to keep appointments.

### **4. Child Care**

Grantees reported favorably regarding cooperation, coordination and collaboration with child care service providers and child care organizations. Thirteen grantees (52%) reported having agreements with higher education programs and services. This was followed by 12 grantees (48%) reporting agreements with the state agency for child care. It is also significant that 40% reported agreements with local child care programs. Six grantees (24%) reported they had no working relationship with state or regional policy/planning committees addressing child care issues.

Seventeen grantees (68%) reported no difficulty exchanging information on resources and other providers and organizations regarding child care and community needs assessment. Fifteen (62.5%) reported no difficulty in sharing data and information on children jointly served. Generally, Head Start grantees are successful establishing partnerships with other child care providers. Although mostly successful in assisting families in accessing full-year, full-day services and aligning policies and practices

with other service providers this can be difficult. Twenty-four percent and 21.7% respectively found this to be difficult.

Responses indicate that written agreements with local child care providers and Georgia Pre-K are very effective. Some grantees indicate agreements for transportation, facilities, extended care, and joint training prove to be very effective. They also report effective agreements with institutions of higher learning.

Reported challenges include long wait lists for services including Head Start and subsidies. Transportation is a challenge, especially in rural areas. The high cost of transportation is an issue. Head Start regulations are more stringent making it a challenge to enter into partnerships with lower expectations. CAPS funding has significantly decreased. Affordable or free extended care is needed to support working parents and parents attempting to further their education. Acceptable space for classrooms is limited in some areas.

Some grantees expressed a desire to operate Head Start/Georgia Pre-K blended programs.

## **5. Family Literacy Services**

Most significant is the fact that from 41.7 % to 64% of the grantees reported that they had no working relationship with Even Start, museums, or the U. S. Department of Education Title 1 Part A Family Literacy. Close behind at 36% were relationships with school libraries. Georgia reported referrals and collaborative agreements with adult education programs ELL programs, public libraries, reading readiness programs and resources provided by institutions of higher learning and providers of family literacy services.

It was reported that Georgia Head Start Grantees feel they are doing an excellent job incorporating family literacy into program policies and practices, exchanging information regarding resources related to family literacy, establishing partnerships with key literacy partners and providers other than libraries, educating parents and the community about the importance of family literacy and recruiting families to family literacy services.

Comments indicate that program efforts to address family literacy needs through information, adult education, Family Partnership Agreements, collaborative agreements, GED programs, Technical Colleges, and ESL programs are successful.

Challenges regarding family literacy include lack of funding for books and other resources, incentives for parents to complete high school, motivating parents to take advantage of literacy programs. Literacy is not a priority for families in crisis.

## **6. Services for Children with Disabilities**

Grantees reported that they have a high degree of involvement and collaboration with agencies providing services for children with disabilities. Collaboration is highest (64%) with the State Education Agency, Section 504, 62.5% with local Part C providers, local Part B/619 providers, Non-Head Start Work groups and state/local interagency coordinating councils (48%)the state lead agency for Part C (41.7%)state-funded programs for children with disabilities (32%).

Fourteen grantees (56%) indicate no working relationship with university or community colleges regarding services and programs for children with disabilities. Grantees (12%) reported extreme difficulty in coordinating services with Part C providers. Forty-eight percent reported having some difficulty in obtaining timely evaluations of children.

Responses indicate that agreements with local school systems to provide services, sharing facilities with the Board of Education, joint training for Response to Intervention (RTI) with LEAs, having an LEA on site, and partnerships with Babies Can't Wait help programs be effective in providing services for children with disabilities.

The implementation and new procedures for RTI is posing a real challenge and is causing delays in providing services to children with disabilities.

## **7. Community Services**

Georgia Grantees report that they are successfully referring, sharing information, and working collaboratively with law enforcement, providers of substance abuse prevention and treatment, providers of child abuse prevention/treatment, providers of domestic violence prevention/treatment, private resources geared toward prevention/intervention, and providers of emergency services. Less than 12% indicated they had no working relationship with providers of emergency services and private providers. They indicated (from 84% TO 56%) no difficulty in establishing partnerships with law enforcement; state, county, city resources regarding prevention and treatment; obtaining in-kind community services; changing information with other resources and providers; partnering with service providers on outreach services; establishing linkages with private resources for prevention and treatment and sharing data on children jointly served.

Some responses from grantees attribute local agreements with service providers as key to successful service delivery. Targeted resource directory provided to parents is also sighted as being effective. Family Connection has been an excellent collaborative and community support is critical.

Challenges are reported in finding services for children and families not meeting eligibility requirements for service due to immigration status. There is often a long delay in services due to a lengthy application process. Rural areas have limited services. Transportation to service providers continues to be an issue. Funding and budget limitations are a challenge.

## **8A. Partnerships with Local Education Agencies**

Four grantees (16%) report they have no working relationship or MOU with a local entity responsible for managing publically funded preschool programs in the area. In Georgia, publically funded preschool programs are not managed by a local entity. They are managed by Bright from the Start; Georgia Department of early Care and Learning, a state department. However, 20% reported exchange of information and referrals with local agencies operating Georgia Pre-K. Twenty-four percent work together with these same local programs, and 40% actually have developed agreements.

The majority of grantees report that they are able to work together on educational activities and curriculum, disseminating information and access for families contacting head Start or other preschool service, selection criteria and priorities, service areas, staff training that includes joint training, program technical assistance, and communication s and parent outreach for transitions to kindergarten facilities

and transportation, and other elements. From 4% to 12% of the responding grantees, there is extreme difficulty in all the aforementioned areas. Grantees (48%) experience somewhat difficulty in the provision of services to meet the needs of working parents.

Grantees report the following as effective ways to have success in this area: having a partnership with the LEA and BOE, receiving both Head Start and Pre-K funding to provide services by blending programs, having open communication with LEAs, and having written agreements in place.

A reported challenge identified was keeping abreast of each program's requirements. There is a break in service when children enroll in Head Start and then leaving to enroll in another program. This prevents the initiation and/or completion of family services. There is also some reluctance to share waiting lists.

### **8B. Head Start transition and Alignment with K-12**

All grantees reported they have a working relationship with LEAs regarding transition from Head Start to kindergarten. Sixteen percent report cooperation and information exchange, 32% report coordination, and 2% share resources and have agreements in place.

Generally grantees reported (from 76% to 48% ) that they had no difficulty coordinating with LEAs on transferring children from Head Start, communicating about transitioning, to staff, social workers etc., establishing and implementing transition policies and procedures, linking services related to language, literacy and numeracy, aligning curriculum and assessments with Head Start Outcomes Framework, aligning curriculum with state early learning standards, partnering with LEAs and parents to assist in the transitioning of children's records, coordinating transportation and shared facilities and support services for children, and conducting outreach to parents to discuss children's needs. However, nine programs find it difficult to establish and implement comprehensive transition policies and eight have some difficulty coordinating transportation. Seven find it somewhat difficult to align Head Start curricula and assessments. Ten find it difficult to align curricula and assessment practices with LEAs and two find this extremely difficult

Some activities that were reported that were found to be successful include working closely with the schools, providing training for Head Start parents on the transition process, having local transition meetings that include local day cares, LEAs, teachers, and parents.

Reported challenges include differences in educational philosophies, transportation, joint staff training, parent follow through.

## **9. Professional Development**

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Eight grantees (32%) have no relationship with on-line courses or programs. Four (16%) have no relationship with other T & TA networks. Twelve (48%) coordinate with the Child Care Resource and Referral Network and the same responses was garnered around coordination with service providers offering relevant TA and cross training opportunities.

Fourteen grantees (56%) reported difficulty in transferring credits between public institutions of learning and 18 (72%) indicated it was somewhat difficult or difficult to accessing early childhood education degrees. A total of 12 grantees (48%) found it either somewhat difficult or difficult. Twelve programs indicated it was somewhat difficult or difficult to provide staff with release time for professional development.

Grantees report that it is helpful to provide CDA training to staff, collaborate with local universities provide approved training hours for staff in-service training, and providing a resource training manual for staff. The HOPE Scholarship and Pell grants support staff development.

Challenges are the limitations of the budget, staff difficulty in receiving access to financial aid, staff release time, staff reluctance to further their education, and on-line accessibility.

#### **10. Addendum: Blended Programs/Braided Funding**

Fifty-six percent of the survey participants indicated that they received funding to operate the Georgia Lottery funded Pre-K program. The definitions of “braided” and “blended” funding were given as follows:

*Braided* refers to utilizing lottery Pre-K funds for the 6.5 hour day and then using Head Start funds for wrap around services. *Blended* refers to the program model in which Georgia’s Pre- K and Head Start children are in the same classroom.

Of the 56% indicating that they received Pre-K finding, 16.7% indicated that they used Pre-K funding differently to braid funding. Some programs partnered with programs who receive Pre-K funding rather than receiving direct funding. Some separate Pre-K and Head Start children in different classrooms.

Some of the reported benefits of braided funding included

- Using the Pre-K funding to support the 6.5 hour day so that Head Start could meet the Head Start requirements. Head Start funding is not enough to enable programs to meet the Head Start requirements.
- Ability to offer full-day, full year programs to meet the needs of children and families
- Enabling all children to receive full services, regardless of the funding stream
- It allows children from all socio-economic groups to participate in the same classroom setting and receive the best from each program.
- Ability to align curriculum for the purpose of transition.
- Eliminates competition for the same children.

On the other hand, reported challenges include

- Additional work for staff in order to meet both program requirements. The Georgia strategic plan will need to include strategies to align the work requirements of Pre-K and the Head Start Performance Standards to make certain that grantees do not experience “double work”. Remaining fiscally compliant with all guidelines
- Braiding funding may do away with Head Start funding in general and that Head Start Pre-K funds should only be limited to Pre-K and the same for Head Start Pre-K consultants often ignore Head Start regulations

It was reported that 215 classrooms receive Georgia Pre-K funding and that 56 of these braid funding so that Pre-K provides the 6.5 hour day and Head Start funds the wrap around services. On the average, .94 hours are supported per day using Head Start funding where braided funding occurs.

Head Start programs indicated that they operate an average of 7.59 hours daily. They also reported serving 1,700 children in blended Pre-K/Head Start classrooms in the 2007-2008 school year and report serving 1,826 children during this year (2008-2009). In blended classrooms for the 2008-2009 school year, 23.8% of the responding programs indicated that these classrooms were new slots and 28.6 % indicated that these were not new. Forty-seven percent indicated that this question did not apply.

In blended classrooms, it is reported that 1,776 of the children are currently Head Start eligible.

The reported benefits of blended classroom

- Creates a seamless transition into kindergarten and opportunities to share information on comprehensive services with the LEAs.
- The children get the best of both programs-more services and higher quality
- Additional slots are available for children
- More professional development for staff that is provided by Pre-K
- Maximizes funding
- Children are more heterogeneously mixed. Provides more flexibility to provide LRE for children with disabilities. Ability to offer additional activities and instruction.
- Everyone benefits. Financially beneficial to both programs. Families receive more services.

#### Reported challenges in operating blended programs

- Aligning assessment instruments. Pre-K staff should be integrated into Head Start in-service
- Meeting dual regulations
- Teacher workload increases
- Duplication of information
- Resistance from local boards of education
- Same as braided
- Pre-K consultants need to recognize Head Start regulations

#### Other issues

- Funding is needed to support expanding services to serve more three year olds
- Georgia Pre-K is not funded at a level that can sustain quality without additional funding. Georgia Pre-K funding is much lower than surrounding states
- Directors need training on managing the finances of both programs
- Would like to pilot a three year old program in south Georgia
- Agencies receive the same amount of funding to serve 6.5 hours as we do for 12 hours
- Did not have opportunity to apply and receive braided funding due to lack of federal funds to support wrap around services, nor do we possess appropriate space for more children
- Have a state group to look at requirements and develop a system to prevent "clash"

Of those who responded that do not presently offer Georgia Pre-K, 13% indicated an interest in participating in the future, 8.7% indicated that they would not be interested, and 8.7% indicated that they would possibly be interested. Approximately 70% indicated that they already offer a blended program. Five programs indicated that they do not presently offer a blended program, but would be interested in doing so and an additional 2 programs indicated that they may be willing to offer a blended program. Two grantees indicated that they would not be interested.

In a situation where additional funding from Pre-K would be offered for a program that has blended classroom, 16 programs indicated that they would be able to offer more Head Start services to more three year old children. Six responded that they would not be able to offer more services to three year olds. The 16 programs indicated that they would be able to serve an additional 702 three year old children.

### **Conclusion**

**The response from Georgia Head Start Directors indicated that they learned additional information from the process of completing the survey, specifically the McKinney-Vento and Title 1 questions. Having staff involved in the completion of the survey made the process less time consuming. Although a committee was appointed to develop a strategic plan, the Georgia Head Start Association (GHSA) began to work on obvious areas in need of improvement. This included problems with Response to Intervention (RTI) as well as moving forward in partnering more effectively with Even Start.**

**The additional questions about blended and braided Head Start/ Pre-K classrooms precipitated several meetings between Georgia Pre-K and Head Start. As a result of these meetings, 100% of Georgia Head Start Grantees committed to blended classrooms and specific sites were identified for possible Georgia Pre-K funding. Georgia Pre-K agreed to add Head Start children to Georgia Pre-K wherever appropriate.**

**Several areas were identified that were not adequately captured in the survey. These included issues regarding lead poisoning prevention and screening and the need for more effective data collection. To this end, two additional committees were appointed by GHSA and these will be included in the Georgia Head Start Strategic Plan.**

