

Maine Head Start



State Collaboration Office Needs Assessment



2009 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Child and Family Services
An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

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This report was prepared by the Maine Head Start Collaboration Office. Development, production and distribution of the report were supported by funds from the Maine Head Start State Collaboration Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, account number 013-10A-0545-8256-042. The content of this report does not represent the official position of the funding source. It was published in 2009.

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Maine Head Start State Collaboration Office Needs Assessment 2009 Executive Summary

This Maine Head Start State Collaboration Needs Assessment report presents findings from a survey of staff and directors representing the Head Start programs in Maine for the school years 2007-2009. The survey was distributed in January and February 2009, and was designed to gather information for a site-based assessment of Head Start programs with specific focus on cooperation, coordination and collaboration within the following nine key activity areas:

- Health care
- Children experiencing homelessness
- Welfare/child welfare
- Child care
- Family literacy services
- Children with disabilities and their families
- Community services
- Education (divided into publicly funded Pre-K partnership development and Head Start transition and alignment with K-12)
- Professional Development

Maine Head Start programs include:

Waldo County Head Start
Community Concepts, Inc.
Aroostook County Community Action Program
Penquis Community Action Program
People's Regional Opportunity Program (P.R.O.P.)
Midcoast Maine Community Action
Kennebec Valley Community Action Program
Child & Family Opportunities, Inc.
Androscoggin Head Start & Child Care
York County Community Action
Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation
Little Feathers Head Start
Maliseet Head Start
Passamaquoddy Head Start

Survey Instruments

There were three main parts to the survey. First, data were gathered to identify the extent of involvement that each Head Start program has with various service providers and organizations by content area. A listing of possible agencies for interaction within each activity area was based on recommendations from the National Office of Head Start. A scale was developed to capture the range of involvement from "no working relationship" to a full "collaborative relationship." The definitions of the range of involvement are as follows:

- **Collaboration** represents the greatest level of involvement, in which the Head Start agency shares resources and/or has formal, written agreements with the various providers or organizations. Examples of collaboration include co-funded staff or building costs, joint grant funding for a new initiative, or a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on transition.
- **Coordination** represents the next lower level of involvement, in which the Head Start agency works together on projects or activities with the various providers or organizations. Examples of coordination include parents from the service providers' agency being invited to the Head Start agency's parent education night, or the service provider offering health screenings for the children at the Head Start agency's site.
- **Cooperation** represents the lowest level of involvement, in which the Head Start agency exchanges information with the various providers or organizations. Examples of cooperation include making and receiving referrals.
- **No working relationship** represents lack of involvement between the Head Start agency and the various providers or organizations. They do not make referrals, do not work together on projects or activities, and do not share information.

Second, information was obtained regarding the level of difficulty each program has had engaging in each of the variety of tasks associated with the respective activity areas. A four-point scale was used to measure the level of difficulty which ranged from **not at all difficult** to **extremely difficult**.

Finally, open-ended questions were used to document any remaining concerns and to give respondents an opportunity to share insight about what is working well in their program.

Methodology

Surveys were emailed to the directors of Maine's 14 Head Start programs with instructions to obtain input from other staff members with content lead responsibilities for each of the activity areas. The email explained the purpose of the survey and requested each Head Start director to distribute one set of the surveys to the appropriate people tasked with each activity. If a person was responsible for more than one activity area, they were to fill out each of the surveys that corresponded to their areas of responsibility. The directors were requested to fill out the surveys themselves. All surveys were returned to the Maine State Data Center for analysis.

In total, 30 responses were received from representatives of 10 of 14 Head Start programs in Maine. Respondents included Directors and content area specialists.

Key Activity Area 1: Health Care

Level of Involvement:

For every provider/organization, the majority of respondents said they had at least a cooperative level of involvement. Overall, the best relationships were with Women, Infants, Children (WIC) and with local agencies providing mental health prevention and treatment.

For each provider/organization, at least one respondent said they had **no working relationship at all**. More than one-fourth said they had **no working relationship** with state agencies providing mental health services and treatment services, and nearly one-fourth with dental home providers for treatment and care.

Level of Difficulty:

More than three-fourths said they found linking children to dental homes that serve young children to be difficult or **extremely difficult**. This was the only task in which the majority of respondents answered extremely difficult. More than 30% of respondents also identified assisting families to get transportation to appointments, partnering with oral health professions on oral-health related issues, and assisting parents to communicate effectively with medical/dental providers as **extremely difficult**.

The majority of respondents indicated getting children enrolled in MaineCare and getting full representation and active commitment on their Health Advisory Committees to be **not at all difficult**.

Comments:

Comments overwhelmingly indicate that finding dentists who accept MaineCare is a challenge, and that respondents are struggling to get appropriate lead screenings for children from medical providers.

Key Activity Area 2: Children Experiencing Homelessness

Level of Involvement:

More than half the respondents said they had **no working relationship** with their local Title I director (if Title I funds are being used), and one fewer reported **no working relationship** with their local McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act liaison.

Slightly more than one-third of respondents said they had **cooperative** relationships with local agencies serving families experiencing homelessness, and/or with local housing agencies and planning groups (like shelters).

Level of Difficulty:

Approximately one-third of respondents identified engaging community partners, including the local McKinney-Vento Liaison, in conducting staff cross training and planning activities and in coordination with LEA, developing and implementing family outreach and support efforts under McKinney-Vento and transition planning for children experiencing homelessness as **difficult or extremely difficult**.

A majority (82.6 percent) said they found implementing policies and procedures to ensure that children experiencing homelessness are identified and prioritized for enrollment to be **not at all difficult**.

Comments:

Comments indicate additional needs related to children experiencing homelessness, including more resources, better solutions to additional stress factors, and full day care

Key Activity Area 3: Welfare/Child Welfare

Level of Involvement:

The strongest relationships seem to be with the Employment and Training and Labor service agencies, followed by TANF and Child Welfare. TANF was the only provider/organization with which every single respondent said they had at least a **cooperative** relationship.

The weakest seem to be with the Economic and Community Development councils, services and networks supporting foster and adoptive families and the Children's Trust agency.

Level of Difficulty:

For each task, the most commonly reported ranking was **not at all difficult**. For each task but two, at least 50 percent of respondents chose **not at all difficult**—the exceptions being establishing and implementing local interagency partnerships or agreements and facilitating shared training and technical assistance opportunities, both chosen by 45 percent of respondents. The majority of respondents (80%) indicated that implementing policies and procedures to ensure that children in the child welfare system are prioritized for enrollment was **not at all difficult**.

Comments:

Comments indicate that when direct contact with providers/organizations is made, relationships are successful.

Key Activity Area 4: Child Care

Level of Involvement:

The strongest level of involvement seemed to be with *state agencies for child care*, with 70 percent of respondents reporting a **collaborative** relationship. For each provider/organization, the bulk of respondents said they had a **collaborative** relationship, except for *higher education programs/services/resources related to child care*, with which 40 percent of respondents said they had a **collaborative** relationship and 40 percent said they had a *coordinating* relationship.

Level of Difficulty:

At least half of all respondents indicated that *establishing linkages/partnerships with child care providers, exchanging information on roles and resources with other providers/organizations regarding child care and community needs assessment, and sharing data/information on children that are jointly served* to be not **at all difficult**.

Aligning policies and practices with other service providers and assisting families to access full-day, full year services were identified as **somewhat difficult** by approximately half of all respondents.

Comments:

Comments indicate additional problems, including long waiting lists, scarce funding, inflexible regulations and a lack of adequate resources.

Key Activity Area 5: Family Literacy Services

Level of Involvement:

There was no discernible pattern to the responses to this question. The bulk of the responses fell within each possible category for at least one provider/organization. Most respondents said they had **no working relationship** with *museums, Even Start, Born to Read and Raising Readers*. Most said they had a **collaborative** involvement with *parent education programs/services and higher education programs/services/resources related to family literacy*.

Level of Difficulty:

Almost half (47.4 percent) said they found *coordinating with Even Start* to be **difficult** or **extremely difficult**, and 26.3 percent said they found it to be **somewhat difficult**. A majority of respondents indicated that *establishing linkages/partnerships with key local level organizations/programs (other than libraries), recruiting families to Family Literacy Services, and educating others (parents, the community) about the importance of family literacy* to be **somewhat difficult**.

Incorporating family literacy into your program policies and practices was identified as **not at all difficult** by 68.4% of respondents.

Key Activity Area 6: Children with Disabilities

Level of Involvement:

The strongest working relationships seem to be with *Regional CDS agencies for children 3-5* (84.2% **collaboration**) followed by *State Child Development Services (CDS) for children 3-5* (63.2% **collaboration**) and *Regional CDS Agencies for children 0-3* (57.9% **collaboration**).

The only provider/organizations with which a majority did not indicate a **coordinating** or **collaborative** relationship were *Non-Head Start councils, committees or work groups that address policy/program issues regarding children with disabilities (for example, Maine Advisory Council on the Education of Children with Disabilities, Maine's Expanding Inclusive Opportunities Initiative)*.

Level of Difficulty:

For each task, the majority of respondents said they found it not at all **difficult**, except for *obtaining timely evaluations of children*, which a majority found **somewhat difficult**, and *having staff attend IEP or IFSP meetings*, which the majority split evenly between **not at all difficult** and **somewhat difficult**.

Comments:

Comments indicate additional issues with turnaround times for referrals and restrictive eligibility criteria.

Key Activity Area 7: Community Services

Level of Involvement:

The strongest working relationship seems to be with *providers of child abuse prevention/treatment services* for which 72.2% of respondents indicated **coordination** or **collaboration**. The weakest working relationship seems to be with *law enforcement* for which 22.2% of respondents indicated **no working relationship**.

Level of Difficulty:

At least half of all respondents identified the following as **somewhat difficult**: *establishing linkages/partnerships with law enforcement agencies, sharing data/information on children/families served jointly by Head Start and other agencies re: prevention/treatment services, exchanging information on roles and resources with other providers/ organizations regarding community services, partnering with service providers on outreach activities for eligible families, and establishing linkages/partnerships with private resources (e.g., faith-based, foundations, business) regarding prevention/treatment services*.

Key Activity Area 8A: Partnerships with Local Education Agencies

Level of Involvement:

The majority (72.2%) of respondents indicated a **collaborative** relationship with their Local Education Agencies. One respondent indicated **no working relationship** with their Local Education Agencies.

Level of Difficulty:

Most respondents found tasks related to this area to be **not at all difficult** or **somewhat difficult**. *Communications and parent outreach for transition to kindergarten* seems to be the least challenging task with 66.7% of respondents stating that the task is **not at all difficult**. For each task, at least one respondent said they found it **extremely difficult**.

Key Activity Area 8B: Head Start Transition and Alignment with K-12

Level of Involvement:

All respondents indicated some working relationship with LEAs during the past 12 months regarding transition from Head Start to Kindergarten, with half reporting a **collaborative** relationship.

Level of Difficulty:

Approximately three quarters of respondents indicated that aligning *Head Start curricula with state Early Learning Standards* was **not at all difficult**. However, 72.2% reported the task of *Aligning curricula and assessment practices with LEAs* was **somewhat difficult**.

Key Activity Area 9: Professional Development

Level of Involvement:

For each provider/organization, the majority of respondents said they had at least a **cooperative** involvement. The majority (70.6%) of respondents indicated a **collaborative** relationship with the *Head Start T & TA Network*. Approximately half of respondents also indicated a **collaborative** relationship with the *Child Care Resource & Referral Network*.

Level of Difficulty:

No respondents said they found *accessing T and TA opportunities in the community* to be **extremely difficult** and 52.9% reported this task was **not at all difficult**. More than half of the respondents indicated that *accessing scholarships and other financial support for professional development programs/activities* and *transferring credits between public institutions of learning* was **somewhat difficult**.

Recommendations

- Work with Head Start agencies to develop a comprehensive strategic plan.
- Support Head Start agencies in their efforts to increase the accessibility of dental homes for children receiving MaineCare (Medicaid).
- Assist Head Start agencies in collaborating with their local mental health agencies.
- Support Head Start Agencies to increase awareness of homelessness definitions and implement services for children and families without homes.
- Support Head Start Agencies to increase collaboration with local McKinney-Vento Liaisons.
- Provide educational and networking opportunities to support Head Start staff understanding of Title I funding streams, and support collaboration efforts.
- Assist Head Start agencies in addressing challenges related to lead screenings.
- Support the expansion of Early Head Start programming.
- Develop strategies to increase clarity of communication from State offices.
- Assist Head Start agencies in strengthening family literacy initiatives.
- Encourage Head Start agency participation in committees and/or work groups that address policy/program issues related to children with disabilities.
- Support Head Start agencies in the development and expansion of public Pre-K collaborations.
- Assist Head Start agencies to advocate for the expansion of higher education programs and distance education options

Maine Head Start



EARLY CARE & EDUCATION
Early Childhood Division



Department of Health
and Human Services

*Maine People Living
Safe, Healthy and Productive Lives*

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