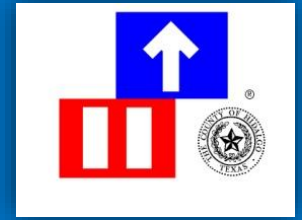


# HIDALGO COUNTY HEAD START PROGRAM

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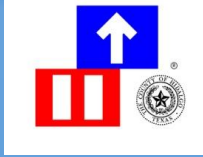
## 2023 Self-Assessment



Policy Council Approval: 00/00/0000  
Commissioners Court Approval: 00/00/0000

Nora Silva Muñoz, M.Ed.  
Assistant Program Director

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# **SELF-ASSESSMENT PY 2022-2023**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program (HCHSP) with forty (40) years of Head Start experience, is focused on providing high-quality services to promote children’s optimal development and family well-being. HCHSP is designed to address the needs of the community and utilizes its strengths to generate a process that includes data collection from the community assessment, surveys, meetings with stakeholders, and groups such as, parents, members of the Policy Council, the Governing Body, community partners and Head Start staff.

Our service and recruitment area encompasses 1,569 square miles of territory and is situated in the southernmost tip of Texas along the U.S.-Mexico border and flanked by Starr County to the west, Jim Hogg and Brooks Counties to the north, Willacy and Cameron Counties to the east, and the Rio Grande River to the south. We continue to deliver HS services to 3,690 children, ages 3-5, through a network of thirty-six (36) centers located in the cities and urban areas where the largest targeted population and greatest needs exist.

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

The Program goals remain focused and informed by the needs and strengths reflected in the Community Assessment and are responsive in meeting our community needs as well as any new developing challenge. By using the Self-Assessment process, the Program can annually assess how specific aspects of the program’s operations impact services delivered to children and families, and identify the progress made in meeting it’s goals and objectives.

HCHSP Program's Goals:

- **To maintain funded enrollment and daily attendance at 100%**
- **To promote workforce professional development for employees and parents**
- **To increase parental engagement in their child's educational activities specifically in the areas of literacy and social emotional development**
- **To promote the health and safety of staff, children and families**
- **To sustain the School Readiness Partnership Model with all school districts in our service area**

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program (HCHSP) Self-Assessment is conducted annually in accordance with CFR 45, Subpart J, 1302.102(b)(2)(i)(ii)(iii) of the *Head Start Performance Standards*. *The Head Start Program Performance Standards* requires that at least once each program year, with the consultation and participation of the policy groups and, as appropriate, other community members, the grantee conduct a self-assessment. HCHSP is committed to providing quality services for children and families in Hidalgo County. This is demonstrated through ongoing training, coaching, and the establishment of monitoring practices.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the self-assessment is to identify program strengths and to determine areas that are in need of program improvement. This will enable the program to achieve the goal for providing

the best possible services to children and families. Each aspect of the program is carefully examined and the outcomes are analyzed. Key insights from the annual self-assessment will help the Program evaluate the progress toward meeting goals, compliance with regulatory requirements, and the effectiveness of professional development and family engagement systems in promoting school readiness.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program's annual Self-Assessment was conducted February 7, 2023 through February 28, 2023. The Office of Head Start Guide to Self-Assessment was used in this self-assessment.

Data was collected from program sources including program records, reports, policies and procedures, interviews and observations. HCHSP uses the web-based GoEngage child and family tracking system, Children's Learning Institute's Circle Progress Monitoring, MIP and other computerized systems for data and document management. The data was analyzed by the Self-Assessment team and presented to the Assistant Program Director for review and the development of the final report.

The Self-Assessment process was led with a focus on strengths and successes. A positive approach was used to encourage teams to focus on what is going well and to use those successes to help guide other projects. The teams were instructed to concentrate on the patterns and trends to address key systemic issues or concerns, what strategies were implemented to address these concerns, where the program is now and what the plan is moving forward. Discoveries and recommendations

from the Self-Assessment team will be used to inform program planning and continuous improvement.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT TEAMS:**

### **Fiscal**

Elma Carrera, CFO

### **Mental Health**

Melissa Gallegos

Elizabeth Abad

Elizabeth Gonzalez

### **Child Development**

Connie Casas

Hector Guerra

Karina Larios

Nadia De Leon

### **Special Services**

Sonia Balderas

Mirna Gonzalez

### **ERSEA/Family and Community**

Elvira Segura

Ramiro Silva

Ana Villaurrutia

### **Child Health and Safety**

Yesenia Quintanilla

Victor Barroso

Maria Martinez

Paulita Gonzalez

### **Child Nutrition**

Gilbert Silva

Aurora Figueroa

Cristina Garza

### **Transportation/Field Op**

Oscar Palacios

Nick Castillo

Oliver Solis

### **Human Resources**

Marissa Reyes

Herlinda Hernandez

Debra Gamboa  
Irma-Garza Acuna  
Hermelinda Corona

## **PARENT PARTICIPATION**

The Program extends its appreciation to the one-hundred and sixty-four (164) parents that participated in our Self-Assessment process by answering our survey. Their participation in the Self-Assessment strengthens our commitment to engage parents in the decision-making process to improve services to children and families.

Parent survey and response:

### **What kind of things is your child learning by participating in Head Start?**

Children are learning social skills and becoming more independent. Parents indicate that their children's vocabulary has developed significantly. Children are being taught the fundamental skills such as letter and number recognition, as well as identifying shapes and colors.

### **What other things would you like to see your child learn? Have you discussed this with your child's teacher?**

Parents have had discussions with their child's teacher regarding things they would like to see in the classroom:

- Technology
- Learn to read
- More outdoor play activities

- Arts and Crafts

**Have you participated in home visits with the teaching staff as well as staff/parent conferences? Tell me about those visits and conferences.**

Yes. Home visits are taking place and allow the teacher to discuss child's progress on a one to one level. Home visits give the teacher and parents time to plan on how support the child to be most successful in the classroom.

**Do you work together with your child's teacher to plan activities that you can do with your child in your home?**

Yes. Parents indicate that they have good communication with their child's teacher. Take-home activities are provided to parents to reinforce classroom activities and promote family time.

**How have you chosen to be involved in Head Start and how has the program benefited your family?**

Parents stay engaged with the program by attending parent meetings and taking active roles as committee officers and Policy Council members. They feel this allows them to stay more aware of the student activities, program services, and community resources. Another advantage offered to head start parents is the opportunity to become employed by the program.

**Do you know what to do if you have a complaint?**

Parents are aware of the process to file a complaint. They can talk to the teacher, campus director, or call the administration office if necessary. Parent handbooks are provided to all parents where grievance procedure is indicated.

## **KEY INSIGHTS**

The Self-Assessment team identified program strengths and successes that can potentially be build upon to support continuous quality improvement. Management will utilize the information to make decisions about program operations that will seek to improve service delivery and close any identified gaps in the program's overall performance.

### **Fiscal**

#### **Strengths**

- Abila MIP Fund Accounting Software is utilized for budgeting, financial reporting electronic requisitioning, general ledger, payroll processing, accounts payables, bank reconciliations, expenditure forecasting and analysis, fixed assets, and Human Resources Management.
- Human Resources/Benefits module integrated with the Payroll module ensures data can easily and readily be accessible for payroll and HR processing; eliminates the number of times data is entered into the database, saves time, provides less probability of error from occurring and separation of duties is in place.
- EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer) module was recently implemented for submitting online electronic payments to vendors.
- School district partnerships generate approximately \$4.3 million dollars annually of Non-federal Match contributions to the Program by providing school district teachers and

classroom facilities at the school district campuses. Some school districts also provide bus transportation for several Head Start centers.

- Certified Independent Appraisal has been secured to establish a current fair market value on real property and space donated by local school districts which is used for valuation of Non-federal Match generating approximately \$3.5 million dollars annually.
- E-Services are accessed through IRS website to verify Vendor W-9's Employer Identification Numbers (EIN's). This service enables the Program to conduct business with eligible vendors that are not debarred from conducting business with a Federal Program.
- MIP Requisition module item codes have been expanded to account for individualized items purchased throughout the year.
- Have established a strong collaboration with the County of Hidalgo Purchasing Department.
- The Program goals and objectives are met by developing a comprehensive budget that meets the financial and administrative requirements consistent with the Head Start Program Performance Standards §1303.5 Limitation on development and administrative costs. The Community Assessment, Annual Self-Assessment, Program Plan, the T&TA plan, GoEngage, and PIR information are used to develop a budget to meet Program goals. In addition, with the Program's MIP Fund Accounting Software, function codes are created to differentiate between administrative and development costs.

- The Fiscal Policies and Procedures clearly outline the duties, functions, and responsibilities in the Finance Department. The procedures detail a step by step process which incorporates strong internal controls and segregation of duties.
- Procurement staff utilizes the Electronic Requisitions to easily track department purchases and availability of funds in department budget line items.
- The approval process for Program purchases, include oversight by the Department Director, Procurement Director, Chief Financial Officer, and the Assistant Program Director.

### **Areas of Concern**

- No concerns noted at this time.

### **What is the Plan for the future?**

- Electronic time sheets are highly recommended to save time and effort, increase productivity and accuracy and minimize error and data entry. A biometric time keeping system is highly recommended and fiscal staff is attending virtual training at this time keeping software compatible with MIP.
- The number of children enrolled and the number of meals served has decreased in 2023 and budget costs such as the percentages on custodian's salaries and fringe benefits paid by the Nutrition budget will be absorbed by the Head Start Program budget. Additionally, a closer look at food and non-food item expenditures should be monitored to ensure that no excess purchases are made. Vacant positions for the Nutrition Program should also be placed on hold until the number of children enrolled increases and staff is needed.

- A travel log software Program is highly recommended for staff traveling to and from centers for Program business. Fiscal staff is also in the process of meeting with a Trip Log software representative to explore the possibilities of implementing the software to keep track of travel time and travel destinations for Program staff.

## **Mental Health**

### **Strengths**

The Mental Health Department continues to practice, implement and execute the following areas:

- Research-based Conscious Discipline strategies integrated in the Daily Lesson Plan for every classroom.
- Participation of children during Greeting Circle Time to build a sense of community, foster emotional development and provide opportunities to practice social skills.
- Participation of children each day with “The Brain Smart Way” which allows children to unite as one group, connect with each other through various greeting activities, disengage the stress response as they transition from home to school and commit to a wonderful day of learning and caring for each other.
- Participation of children during Closing Circle Time to reflect on daily social commitments made during Greeting Circle Time.
- Research-based Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) instrument used to focus on three protective factors: attachment, self-control and initiative which are closely related to social and emotional development.

- Implementation of behavior strategies to support children in the areas of initiative, self-regulation and attachment.
- Positive Behavior Support is utilized to identify reasons for challenging behavior, teach alternate approaches, and minimize factors that trigger challenging behavior.
- Integration of Trauma-Informed Approaches into our policies, practices, and procedures.
- Successful community partnerships to facilitate access to mental health resources and services for our children, families, and staff.
- Mental Health staff is available to consult with staff and families as needed to secure mental health services.
- Utilization of Monitoring Calendar to prioritize tasks and meet deadlines.
- Accurate record keeping and monitoring of DECA assessment to identify children's social emotional strengths and/or needs to plan for support and assist in areas identified.

**Areas of Concern.**

- Children exhibiting Challenging Behavior
- Employee and Staff Wellness
- Continuous need for training staff in strategies to address challenging behavior and deliver instruction successfully.

**Strategies implemented to address Concerns:**

- The Hidalgo County Head Start Program created a Rapid Response Intervention Team to address children with challenging behavior. The team is designed to address concerns in

the area of social emotional development. The RRIT is intended to provide support and guidance to our classroom staff and parents.

- Mental Health Counselors continue to ensure that they are available to consult with staff and families as needed to secure mental health services.
- The Mental Health Department continues to monitor DECA assessment to identify children's social and emotional strengths and needs.
- Continue promoting staff well-being and implementing an employee wellness program that encourages self-care, healthy coping techniques, and trauma-informed approaches.
- Continue to encourage staff to participate in professional development, webinars and trainings to expand their knowledge and skills in working with children with challenging behaviors.
- In collaboration with the Hidalgo County Grantee Board, our staff can benefit from the following resources:
  - Preventative Measure Program: Wellness Screenings
  - Wellness Challenges: Fitness Classes and Trainings
  - Wellness Support Groups
  - Vera Whole Health Edinburg Care Center
  - Flu Vaccine Clinics
  - Hidalgo County Health Fair
  - HEB Nutrition Services
  - Lunch & Learn Cooking Classes
  - Employee Assistance Program

-Hidalgo Fit Newsletter

-COVID 19 Resources

-Telemedicine: Teledoc

- Through the County Wellness Program, our staff has the opportunity to match their needs with sessions and activities conducted by the county. Webinars are available to all employees to raise awareness on health and personal wellbeing.

### **Where are we now?**

- The Mental Health Department continues to support children, staff and families as we deliver services to improve the quality of life in our community. It is important that our staff feel emotionally stable, supported, and encouraged; and by doing so, we have continued to stress the importance of an open-door policy, open lines of communication and continue to encourage staff to practice self-care.
- The Mental Health Department is committed to supporting Hidalgo County Head Start employees in the successful implementation of resilience resources that promote the healthy social emotional development of children by implementing Frog Street Conscious Discipline, Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) and Positive Behavior Support.

### **What is the Plan for the Future?**

- Develop and support a protocol for staff to ensure that they secure the assistance and training they need to remain healthy; physically and emotionally to be able to serve children in their classrooms with confidence and success.

- Continue expanding staff well-being and implementing an employee wellness program to encourage self-care, healthy coping techniques, and trauma-informed approaches.
- Continue to provide more intensified training to all program staff in the area of Mental Health: Social and Emotional Development.
- Continue to provide support and guidance to classroom staff to promote a positive and supportive classroom community where children can manage their emotions and behaviors safely.
- Continue to provide professional development for Center Directors to build capacity as instructional leaders.
- Continue integrating Trauma Informed Approaches into our policies, practices and procedures.

## **Child Health and Safety**

### **Strengths**

- Mandatory Vision and Hearing screening certification - the goal is to equip campus directors, family services workers and nurses in order to facilitate the service to the Head Start families.
- Health notifications for sick children are effective in keeping track of sick children - A sick child who is unable to participate in school in a meaningful way should be taken to their doctor immediately and return to the center with a medical excuse. Keeping a sick child

out protects other children, school staff, or visiting community members from contracting an illness that can be spread from person to person.

- Staffing's assist in terms of further discussing the child's condition with the parent and having the opportunity to educate the staff and parents on the child's signs and symptoms. Parents are also reassured that the staff at the centers are trained on how to administer medication.

**Areas of concern:**

- Follow ups –not being completed or followed through on time by the center staff as directed by health department.
- Immunizations – center staff is not being consistent with requirements mandated by Hidalgo County Health Department and allow children to be present without the required vaccines.
- The number of parents refusing to meet required standards is increasing (i.e. Physicals, dentals, blood level readings) - Parents are always encouraged and educated on the benefits of immunizations, health care and dental care needs.

**Strategies implemented to address Concerns:**

- Nurses visit their assigned centers to monitor and reviews the child's folder, in order to address any health concerns.
- Nurses continuously monitor immunization reports and immtrac2 to get children's vaccines up to date.
- Nurses assist staff and parents in obtaining any missing medical/dental information by calling medical and dental offices.

- Nurses assist in running monthly reports or as needed for the center staff.
- Nurses refer parents to Health Department, Community Resources List, Low income (sliding fee scale) medical and dental clinic: Nuestra Clinica del Valle.
- Nurses coordinate mobile unit clinics with Ashley Pediatrics and Dr. Orfanos.
- Nurses continuously educate parents and staff as needed.
- Nurses organize mandatory Medication administration trainings.
- Nurse coordinate mandatory hearing and vision certification for staff.

### **Where are we now?**

- In order to promote the physical health and well-being of children, staff provides a safe supportive environment and offers health education as needed.
- Health Department and center staff assists families in identifying community agencies that offer services that may be helpful to meet the child and family exclusive health care needs.
- Staff offers access to income-based health/dental services to help families manage their child's chronic health conditions.

### **What is the Plan for the Future?**

- Continue to educate staff on communicable diseases, medication administration and chronic conditions (signs and symptoms). Being properly trained enables and allows the staff to provide these services to the children.
- Health services staff will assist children with preventive care such as immunizations, vision and hearings, as well as acute and emergency care.
- Increase communication with center staff in order to keep all health timeframes in place.

- Improve to be able to meet all standards at 100%.
- Once all health-related paperwork is completely entered to Go Engage, the staff will be able to access a child's records and reports quicker allowing them to follow up on a timely manner.
- For children with chronic health conditions, nurses and other health care providers play a large role in the daily management of a child's health care condition. Health Department nurses and the center staff are responsible for coordinating care by communicating with the child's family and their health care providers so that they can stay healthy and ready to learn.

## **Child Development**

### **Strengths**

- The School Readiness Partnerships with the school districts are working well. The Program implements School Readiness MOU's with 10 school districts where ISD certified personnel (50 Full-Time and 44 Part-Time) co-teach with Head Start teachers in all classrooms. This allows for smaller child-staff ratio. Having smaller groups enhances the learning by providing individualize support. Eighteen (18) Head Start Centers reside within school campuses allowing some to participate in extracurricular activities. ISD Teachers' salaries are allowable as In-Kind contributions.
- The implementation and monitoring of Ignite by Hatch during small group instruction and learning centers has improved children's achievement. The Campus Directors and

classroom staff are able to generate and monitor the class progress report, class play time report, and support needed report. Campus Directors and teachers are encouraged to review these reports at the beginning of the week to determine if children are on track or if they might need additional time to meet their goal.

- The curriculum and resources, HSELOF, Texas Pre-K Guidelines, CLASS and Ignite by Hatch are all aligned.
- There is evidence that implementation of Frog Street Thematic Units, Lesson Plans and Resources are being utilized.
- The children are part of a Dual Language Program. Our Head Start classrooms provide a print rich environment that allows children to recognize print in their dominant language. Classroom staff is trained with the 50/50 Dual Language Model where they are able to identify when to use Language of Instruction (LOI) and Language of the Day (LOD).
- The staff implements an On-going Practice-Based Coaching Program with three expert coaches.
- The staff utilizes a research-based CIRCLE-PM assessment instrument to measure children's progress using Average and Benchmark reports.
- The staff use children's individual performance data to develop the Child's Individual Plan, to plan for and organize instruction one on one, small group and large group based on need and mastery of objectives.
- The CLI Engage platform offers immediate reports for data analysis and grouping tool for individualization purposes based on assessment scores.

- The implementation of the CIRCLE Activity Collection in English and Spanish supports teachers' instructional planning and individualization.
- The Preschool Early Language and Literacy Quick Check is used in the Fall and Spring by Campus Directors to ensure a print rich environment and children's work is proudly displayed through-out the campuses.
- The Program currently supports a total of 41 CLASS reliable employees and a total of 4 CLASS Trainers certified by Teachstone.
- Education Department Staff conduct consistent Education Department meetings to review the teaching and learning in the classroom.
- Education Department Staff conduct frequent Campus Support Visits.
- Dialogues between and amongst departments to share children's progress occurs on a regular basis.
- Children have access to technology via tablets and other devices throughout the day.
- Daily schedules and Lesson Plans include Developmentally Appropriate Practices.
- Progress Report and Report Cards sent to parents to show child's progress.
- Data Sharing between Education Area Directors and Campus Directors occurs on a regular basis.
- Staff implements the use of the Gradual Release Model for trainings.

**Areas of concern:**

- Continue implementing daily schedule, routines, cognitive transitions and lesson plans with fidelity.

- Intentional planning and delivery of instruction must occur daily by the Head Start Staff and District Teacher.
- Continue providing teachers and classroom staff with training on Positive Behavior Support Strategies to identify and support children with social and emotional needs.
- Work on delivery of instruction to promote higher order thinking skills (CLASS Domain: Instructional Support).
- Focus on Progress Monitoring by analyzing CIRCLE-PM and Hatch Data.
- Monitor the teaching and learning daily through walk-throughs, documenting observations, providing feedback, strategies and support to all classroom staff by Campus Directors.
- Use the progress monitoring data more intentionally.
- Establish time management for the Campus Directors to be able to spend more time in the classrooms and planning with teachers.
- Campus Directors need to follow the Mental Health Process more closely when addressing challenging behaviors.
- Additional staff development at the campus level provided by the Campus Director.
- Establish Customer Service practices.
- Study and internalize the 2022 Pre-K Guidelines.
- Refine the outcomes for 3 and 4 year olds.
- Number of children with special needs placed in the same classroom.
- Experiencing severe challenging behaviors in the classroom.

### **Strategies implemented to address Concerns:**

- The Gradual Release Model is being implemented by the Education Department to train campus staff on Individualization, Averages reports and Benchmarks reports.
- Education Department staff and Campus Directors are being trained on how to conduct intentional walk-throughs focusing on CLASS domains, indicators, behavioral markers, individualization and teaching and learning.
- Campus Directors are expected to train and support classroom staff on CLASS domains, indicators, behavioral markers, individualization and teaching and learning.
- Campus Directors are using Classroom Observation Form, On-Going Classroom Support Timeline, and Crosswalk of 15-minute In-Service Suites with CLASS, and Training and Technical Assistance Form to indicate completion of task.
- Campus Directors are required to be actively involved in the planning process with Head Start and ISD staff.
- A Rapid Response Intervention Team was created to assist classroom staff, children, and families to address challenging issues.
- Chief Early Education Officer, Education Area Directors, Education Coordinators, Campus Directors and Campus Staff generate data reports to make informed decisions to meet the program, campus and classroom needs.
- Campus Directors submit walk-through forms and Training and Technical Assistance Form on any activities at the campuses. Education Area Director will monitor submission of documents.

- Education Area Directors and Campus Directors are conducting more intentional walk-throughs.
- Education Area Directors monitor and support all of the leadership daily tasks that Campus Directors are expected to perform via face-to face campus visits, virtual leadership meetings, and electronic communication.
- Conduct training on the 2022 Pre-K Guidelines for the Campus Directors and the teaching staff.
- Review the outcomes for 3 & 4 year olds and establish outcomes accordingly.

### **Where are we now?**

- The Education Department is in the process of providing professional development to address areas of concern.
- Campus Directors will be trained on CIRCLE-PM Wave 2 data analysis. They will be able to generate and analyze their campus scores and provide appropriate support to classroom staff and monitor the teaching and learning in the classroom.
- All Campus Directors are expected to conduct a minimum of 8 walk-throughs on a weekly basis, using the Classroom Observation Form. The form was designed to guide observers to focus on the expected behavior markers in the three domains of CLASS.
- The Campus Directors are expected to meet with the teachers within a few days after the walk-through to provide feedback, strategies and support and acknowledge by signing the Classroom Observation Form. After three weeks of observing the classrooms, the Campus Director will analyze the data collected and will determine the professional development

needed using the 15-minute In-Service Suites. This will provide coaching opportunities to help teachers improve their teaching practices by adhering to On-Going Classroom Support Timeline.

- The Education Department is preparing to collaborate with School Districts as we embark on a new School Readiness Partnership.
- The Education Department is dissecting the 2022 Texas Pre-K Guidelines to train Campus Directors and teaching staff to become knowledgeable in the children's outcomes. The department is working on the topics and PowerPoint presentations for Annual Training to support Head Start staff in the successful implementation of curriculum, assessments, CLASS, technology, instructional leadership and developmentally appropriate practices.

#### **What is the Plan for the Future?**

- The Education Department will continue the delivery of quality services to children and families of Hidalgo County through ongoing professional development, coaching practices, implementation of curriculum with fidelity and the establishment of monitoring protocols and procedures in accordance to Head Start Standards and the Pre-K Guidelines.
- The Education Department will continue working with the School Districts to provide training and support to strengthen School Readiness Partnerships.
- The restructuring of the Memorandum of Understanding to further enhance the School Readiness Partnerships with the school districts to ensure all children are ready for kindergarten.

## **Child Nutrition**

### **Strengths**

- Our program's menu continues to be a strength with minor exceptions.
- Teamwork within the department is to be commended. The ability to multitask by kitchen staff is exemplary.
- Timely meal delivery.
- Flexibility and ability to forecast meals for all campuses with limited resources.
- Accommodating and implementing a large number of special diets for the program.
- The distribution of meal services at the kitchen level.
- Maximizing the number of program meals served.

### **Areas of concern:**

- Employee shortages at the center and kitchen level limit us from executing our overall program goals.
- Campus-level improper food handling of food.
- Time and temperature controls need to improve.
- Campus and Kitchen level equipment needs to be upgraded.
- Incorrect documentation on 1535s continues to be a concern.
- Ability to report monthly meal claims on a timely basis due to delivery delays.

### **Strategies implemented to address Concerns:**

- Fill vacancies at the campus level as soon as possible.
- Additional training for all employees.

- New equipment will be purchased to meet the need of the program.
- Reinforce that all documentation is done properly.
- Additional mail pick-up and delivery times to help expedite all meal claim processes.
- Assign Campus Directors to validate documentation on 1535's.

### **Where are we now?**

- The Nutrition staff have begun to remove old equipment and replaced it with new equipment.
- The Nutrition staff have also implemented department-level mail pick-up.
- In addition, the Nutrition staff is currently training all staff with a new system of electronic meal claims.
- The Nutrition staff is re-training each campus staff based on the findings.

### **What is the Plan for the Future?**

- Implement electronic meal claims.
- Improve food handling practices through new and innovative approaches.
- Data-driven technology will assist to obtain information faster and in a more improved way.
- In collaboration with all campus staff, improve our overall program goals.

## Special Services

### Strengths

- The Program continues to recruit children with disabilities who have been identified and are receiving services through the Local Education Agency's (LEA) Special Education Departments. The 10% funded enrollment of children with disabilities has been exceeded for this program year.
- Staff continues to work collaboratively through the Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the LEA's Special Education Departments (9) to establish cooperative working relationships while ensuring that the appropriate services are provided to the children.
- The LEA's Special Education Department staff provide training to Head Start staff on the referral process.
- Staff continues to work with the LEA's Special Education staff who are providing services to the children, such as In Class Support, Occupational, Physical, Speech Therapy and Itinerant Services.
- The LEA's Special Education staff are providing In Class Support as per IEP to our children in the Head Start classroom allowing children who have more significant disabilities to be educated in a least restrictive environment allowing for total inclusion. The reduction in dual enrollment causes reduced time in a less restrictive setting.

- The Program assigns Disability Classroom Assistants (DCA) to classrooms that have children with a more significant disability to assist the teacher with all the children, this allows for our children to develop alongside non-disabled peers.
- The Program continues to work with parents and staff by enhancing their knowledge of the rights under IDEA to be better advocates for their children/students, trainings for staff during Annual Training and throughout the year are provided as needed, as well as providing exposure to various organizations whose purpose is working with families who have children with disabilities. We continue to partner with the LEA's Special Education Departments in promoting awareness of and for children with disabilities.
- The Program continues to work with the Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Agencies allowing eligible children to make the transition into the Head Start Program by attending the transition meeting and talking with parents about the importance of early intervention.
- Special accommodations are made as needed for parents requiring sign language interpreter.

### **Areas of concern**

Children experiencing challenging behavior is prevalent.

### **Strategies implemented to address Concerns**

- Special Services staff worked closely with Education Department, Mental Health Department, Health Services Department, Family Services Department, Nutrition Department, Special Services Department, as part of the Rapid Response Intervention Team.

- The mental health process for addressing children with challenging behavior was implemented early to ensure appropriate interventions were followed.
- With parent's consent, the staff referred children out to LEA Special Education Department for formal evaluation if there was a suspicion or diagnosis of a disability
- Ongoing monitoring and support continued during special education referral process whether they meet eligibility for special education services or not.
- Classroom staff is provided with T/TA and parent participation in child's development is encouraged.

#### **Where are we now?**

- The Program staff continues to recruit children with disabilities.
- Parents are happy to have their children attend Head Start due to inclusive services.
- The Special Services Department is in the process of transitioning to digital/electronic forms. Training and Technical Assistance is given to center staff on a regular basis and as needed.
- Data collection on GoEngage helps monitor and track information. It assist with the PIR in the area of Disability.

#### **What is the Plan for the Future?**

- The plan is to continue to work collaboratively through MOUs with the LEA Special Education Departments in all aspects of the Special Education process.

- Continue to work closely with ECI agencies to ensure eligible children make the transition into HCHSP. This will ensure that the appropriate services are provided to children with special needs.
- Provide staff with more training on documentation required for child's file and on professional development.
- Continue to enter relevant information onto GoEngage which will help in monitoring and tracking the provision of disability services. Special Services Department will go digital on all required paperwork.
- One of the goals is to have all children eligible for special education services receive services on site at the centers. Currently, children from one LEA are being transported to an elementary campus to receive their therapy sessions due to Special Education staff shortage and therapist's schedule.
- Continue to have communication with the LEA's Special Education Department staff to ensure delivery of quality services to all Head Start children with disabilities.

## **Transportation/Field Operations**

### **Strengths**

- Facilities are kept up to licensing standards.
- Playground equipment is well anchored and has the required resilient surface in place.
- All playground equipment is age appropriate.
- Buses are inspected daily to ensure the safety of the children and inspected yearly to meet Texas Department of Transportation standards.

- Children are transported with a height and weight safety vest and a Bus Monitor on board at all times.
- All facilities are ADA compliant.
- The program provides busses equipped with wheel chair lift.
- Appropriate toilets and grab bars are installed in restrooms with wheel chair turn around radius.
- Playgrounds are accessible by installing rubber mats for wheel chairs to access play areas.
- Facilities are cleaned and disinfected throughout the day.
- Water supply is currently approved by the local municipalities.
- Pest Control Company is utilized for pesticide and herbicide service.
- Only approved chemicals are used and are people and pet friendly.
- Bus Aide interacts with the children in counting, reciting the alphabet, singing and question and answer activity while children are being transported.
- Bus safety training is conducted at the respective center. Once training is completed the pedestrian and bus safety practices participants are issued a certification of participation.

**Areas of concern:**

- Shortage of Bus Drivers for the remaining of the school year may cause lower attendance.
- Shortage of Custodians for the remaining of the school year.

**Strategies implemented to address Concerns:**

- All busses are currently doing double routes.

- Field Operations is working with Human Resources to utilize those Bus Aides without a route to fill vacancies.

### **Where are we now?**

- Applications are being reviewed to determine eligibility for transportation.
- The program currently has forty-eight budgeted custodial positions, forty-one are currently filled (seven vacancies).
- The program currently has twenty-three budgeted bus driver positions, sixteen are currently filled (seven vacancies).

### **What is the Plan for the Future?**

- Continue to incorporate technology in all aspects of field operations utilizing the Go/Engage program.
- Remodel all stand-alone Head Start facilities and playgrounds and furnish with new equipment/supplies where applicable.

## **ERSEA/Family Services and Community Partnerships**

### **Strengths**

- Family Services staff utilizes a service tracking report for updates and follow-up of individual family strengths needs.
- The program has collaborations with agencies that offer an array of services.
  1. Community Service Agency (CSA)
  2. Health Community Clinics

### 3. WIC

### 4. Food Banks

- Head Start has a collaboration with Early Head Start to provide eligibility information and assist with Head Start application for enrollment into Head Start. Transition attends all Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) meetings as children turn three and provides the family with enrollment information.
- Parents stay engaged with the program by attending parent meeting and taking active roles as committee officers and Policy Council members. This provides parents the opportunity to become part of the decision-making process of the program.
- Head Start provides training on father involvement using the Abriendo Puertas curriculum. Fathers are also the focus of some of the center parent meetings. Fathers are part of the Fatherhood Conference where there is specific recognition of their contribution to the center as well as in the classroom. Staff recognizes fathers that go above the everyday responsibilities. Fathers participate in center committee, policy council and other program functions. Staff creates opportunities to engage fathers in the development of their children. Activities such as: Doughnuts for Dads and Fatherhood Conference.
- Head Start provides parents with job placement notices at their specific centers. Head Start parents are provided additional points as prospective employees for Head Start.
- School District Partnerships are working well; parents appreciate having a Head Start teacher, a Head Start assistant teacher and ISD teacher in each classroom which helps with child-teacher ratio.

**Areas of concern:**

The Program has identified two (2) major areas of concern

- Attendance (currently at 82.48% of current enrollment)
- Enrollment (currently lacking 578 children to meet funded enrollment)

**Strategies implemented to address Concerns:**

- Staff created attendance recognition activities, and children are recognized during parent meetings. Staff advised parents about the importance of children attending daily, as it may reflect on assessments. GoEngage reports are utilized to identify specific classrooms with chronic absenteeism.
- Public awareness of the Program is being done through:
  1. Social Media
  2. Head Start flyers
  3. Participation in local community events.
  4. Current and previous Head Start families.
  5. ECI Transition meetings
- Recruitment activities are taking place such as door to door canvassing, community fairs and partnerships with Early Head Start (EHS), Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) and community agencies.
- Head Start staff attends Early Head Start transition meetings with parents to facilitate application process. Head Start staff is also part of Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) transition meetings and staff provides application criteria for the enrollment of these

children as age eligibility occurs. Transition packets are provided to the school districts for graduating Head Start children.

### **Where are we now?**

- Head Start attendance has improved to 84% and staff is talking to parents about the importance of daily attendance.
- Classroom incentives are being implemented at center level.
- The program continues to maintain collaborative efforts with school districts to provide holistic quality services to the children and families.
- Staff continue to recruit on a daily basis.

### **What is the Plan for the Future?**

- Continue to incorporate technology and revise current family partnerships for more intentional and significant individualized services and educational trainings for families. Staff will become more advanced with technology to reach families as they are available and not only during scheduled in person meetings. Technology will be made available for home visits to include ECI meetings.
- Evaluate the Program's effectiveness in enrolling children who are categorically eligible or who meet defined income-eligibility requirements including at least 10% filled by children eligible for services under IDEA.
- Streamline the application and selection process for a user-friendly system for families to alleviate the most common eligibility questions.

- Evaluate the Program’s system used to monitor attendance data to support families in promoting individual child attendance and inform program improvements where monthly attendance rates indicate systematic attendance issues.
- Solicit parent testimonials for program website.
- Utilize staff, families and community members to place recruitment signs in high traffic areas
- Revise the Program’s attendance policy to coincide with the LEAs and review it with staff and families for full implementation.
- Develop an attendance handout encouraging families to build a habit of good attendance and include it in the parent handbook.
- Family Service Workers will monitor attendance in GoEngage and have regular communication with families and advise them of number of absences during routine family service contacts.
- Continue to use various platforms to reach each intended audience to boost knowledge of the Program internally and externally. The platforms include social media and community outreach.
- Ensure ISD partners have an understanding of the enrollment process as well as eligibility requirements and participate in ISD sponsored enrollment events.
- Informed data will be utilized to better serve our children and families.

## Human Resources

### Strengths

- The Human Resources Department continues to work well is in utilizing the documents required by the Hidalgo County Head Start Program Policies and Procedures, Civil Service Rules, and by the Texas Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Regulation Division.
- Numerous employee status reports are used to determine a variety of Human Resources needs. The reports are as follows: Drug Testing Reports, Finger Printing and Background Checks, Tuberculosis Testing Report, Health Appraisal Report, First Aid/CPR Report, List of Probationary Employees, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Report, Workers Compensation Report, New Hire Employee Report, Sick Leave Pool, Report for Policy Council, Personnel Status Report, Employee Evaluation(s) Report, Public Information Report, Employee Vacancy Report, Staff Appreciation Award(s) Report, Screening of Potential Employee(s) Report, Termination Folders Report, Disciplinary Action Reports, Driver(s) License Report, Employee Resignation Reports, Parent List Report, Partnership Reports, PIR Reporting, Employee Benefits Reports, Resignation Report, Exit Interview Reports, and Employee Pension Reports.
- The Human Resources Department conducted a review of personnel files. The sample size included 120 personnel files which were monitored and selected randomly. Six (6) staff members assisted in completing this year's self-assessment initiative. There were relatively few corrections made to the files and these were generally items that were easily

replaced and properly documented. In no instance was there any error in an employee file that would be a deficiency.

- As required by the Texas Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Regulation Division, all caregivers hold a current First Aid and CPR Certification. This also includes current ISD teachers.

According to our records:

- 100% of all employees, volunteers, and ISD Teachers have a current Criminal Background Check as required by Head Start Program Standards and the Texas Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Regulation Division.
- All ISD Teachers have been provided an FBI Criminal Record by being finger printed.
- All ISD Teachers have been provided all required Pre-Service Trainings and/or attended the required Annual Training.
- All ISD Teachers are classified caregivers and counted in the child staff ratio.
- 33.66% of HCHSP active employees (205) are current or former Head Start parents.
- HCHSP is currently budgeted for 722 employees, of which 660 are full-time employees, 8 are part-time employees, and 54 are education substitute teachers. In addition to this we have 27 budgeted positions under the Texas Department of Agriculture for the Nutrition Program. This brings a grand total amount of 749 positions.

Another area where the Human Resources Department is working well is in managing the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and providing employees with safety protocols that reflect the recent updates from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and the Hidalgo County Health Department regarding vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals who test positive for COVID-19

or come in close contact with individuals who test positive for COVID-19. The Human Resources Department continues to monitor and track all employee and student COVID-19 reporting through various reports. We continue to utilize the documents as follows: HCHSP Work Safe Plan, COVID-19 Employee Information Reporting Form, Student Questionnaire for Reporting a Confirmed COVID-19 Positive Case, and the COVID-19 Staff Tracking Infections Report. The Human Resources Department will continue to manage the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to be able to provide a healthy, safe, and comfortable work environment for all Head Start staff and children attending in-classroom instruction.

**Areas of concern:**

- One of the major critical areas of concern is the increase in staff turnover. HCHSP has a current grand total of 749 positions available of which 130 (17%) are currently vacant. The Human Resources Department has experienced an increase in staff turnover due the following reasons:
  1. Higher Compensation
  2. School Full Time
  3. Personal Reasons
  4. Health Reasons
  5. COVID-19 Concerns
  6. Family Matters
  7. Retirement
  8. Relocation
  9. Involuntary Separation

- The HR Department has seen a large increase in staff resigning due to securing employment with the neighboring school districts. This is due to the district's' implementation of a Full Day Pre-K 3 & 4 program. The districts offer competitive compensation to retain their employees which is affecting the Head Start program.
- Understaffing can lead to the following issues:
  1. Program deficiencies due to not meeting child/staff caregiver ratios.
  2. Staff may become overwhelmed with the workload and suffer from stress-related problems, leading to poor performance levels.
  3. The reduction of productivity and the health of our workforce, meaning that some employees may request more time off.
  4. Staff may experience a lack of support.
  5. The quality of work will decrease which affects all stake holders such as; the families, students, and the community.
  6. This will affect the organization's overall goals.
- Another critical area of concern is in being able to maximize the capabilities of the current HR system. The HR Department has fully implemented the MIP HR Management system and has discontinued the use of the SAGE ABRA Suite software. The HR staff continues to input data and scan all required documents to the current program in order to have all documents readily available on each employee's electronic file. The following are some of the critical areas of concern: the need for training on the current software, the lack of available fields for data input, and the lack of accessibility to modify fields.

### **Strategies implemented to address Concerns:**

- The Human Resources Department has been working tirelessly to try to retain staff by providing support and assistance in the areas of need. The HR Department works closely with all other program departments to ensure that staff are provided the support to remain with the program. In order to fill vacancies, the HR staff has been screening applications, conducting interviews for qualified candidates, screening recommendations, and conducting new employee pre-service training throughout the program year. The HR staff understand that some of the staff turnover reasons are beyond our control but do the best that can be done to support the employee in making the best decision for themselves and the program.
- The Human Resources Department staff continues to work closely with the Management Information Systems (MIS) Department and the Finance Department to create fields to be able to capture important data. The HR staff continue to utilize the MIP Manual and online available resources. The HR Department is planning to schedule an MIP training for the department during the 2023-2024 Annual Training.

### **Where are we now?**

- After a slow transition from the SAGE ABRA Suite Software, the Human Resources Department has fully utilized the MIP HR Management System and has become familiar with its capabilities. The HR Department continues to process all data and scan all pertaining documentation to the employee's individual electronic file using the current system.

## **What is the Plan for the Future?**

- After meeting with the Child Care Licensing Inspectors, the HR Department was advised that the department is able to create electronic files for each employee instead of creating a hard copy. The department is currently working on creating the HCHSP mandated policies in an electronic format for each employee to electronically acknowledge during the 2023-2024 Annual Training. While complying with county, state, and federal policies and procedures, the plan for the future is to create an electronic file for all of our documents instead of using hard copies. The HR Department can process a much larger volume of paperwork going paperless instead of using the traditional method. Furthermore, going digital reduces money spent on paper, printers, ink, and office space for files and employee time to manage paperwork.

## **CONCLUSION**

An annual Self-Assessment is a key management practice that works to ensure programs are meeting the Performance Standards and providing high quality services for young children and their families. This years' Self-Assessment confirms that the Hidalgo County Head Start Program has an abundance of strengths on which it can build on. However, as we conclude this years' assessment, it is also clear that we are experiencing four (4) major areas of concern: (1) enrollment (2) attendance (3) staff turnover/vacancies and (4) children with challenging behaviors. These are areas that will require a change of scope and restructuring how we deliver services to children and families in order to ensure high quality service delivery. Staff will address these issues with all the stakeholders as we prepare to plan for next program year.