



# HIDALGO COUNTY HEAD START PROGRAM

P.O. Box 0117  
Edinburg, Texas 78540  
(956) 383-0706



# 2024 ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

Nora Silva Muñoz, M.Ed.  
Assistant Program Director

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Program Goals</b>	<b>1-2</b>
<b>Self-Assessment Requirements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Self-Assessment Teams</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Parent Participation</b>	<b>6-8</b>
<b>Key Insights</b>	
• <b>Fiscal</b>	<b>8-16</b>
• <b>Mental Health</b>	<b>16-24</b>
• <b>Child Health &amp; Safety</b>	<b>24-34</b>
• <b>Child Development</b>	<b>34-63</b>
• <b>Child Nutrition</b>	<b>63-67</b>
• <b>Disabilities</b>	<b>68-74</b>
• <b>Transportation/Field Operations</b>	<b>74-76</b>
• <b>ERSEA/ Family Services/ Community Partnership</b>	<b>76-83</b>
• <b>Human Resources</b>	<b>83-90</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>90-91</b>



## INTRODUCTION

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program (HCHSP) 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.

The 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 3,200 children, ages 3-5, through a network of thirty (30) campuses 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 its goals and objectives.

## HCHSP Program's Goals:

- **To provide high-quality comprehensive services to the highest need children and families and maintain 100% of funded enrollment.**
- **To promote workforce professional development for employees and parents**
- **To increase parental engagement 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 (SRPM) Teaching Together, 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 multifaceted, offering both personal and professional benefits.

- **Enhance Self Awareness** – By critically evaluating performance, strengths, and weaknesses, the program gains deeper insights into areas requiring development.
- **Guide Professional Development** – It identifies specific areas where improvement or upskilling is needed, facilitating targeted growth plans.
- **Boost Motivation and Engagement** – Recognizing achievements and understanding how contributions impact broader goals can significantly increase motivation and engagement.
- **Inform Goal Setting** – Self-assessment helps in setting realistic and challenging goals for future performance, based on past achievements and lessons learned.
- **Facilitate Feedback and Dialogue** – It creates a foundation for open dialogue with peers and supervisors, offering a structured way to discuss achievements, expectations, and areas of growth.
- **Improve Performance** – By continuously identifying and addressing areas for improvement, the Program can enhance staff performance, contributing to success.
- **Enhance Accountability** – Regular self-assessment encourages individuals to take responsibility for continuous improvement and achievements, fostering a culture of accountability.

Overall, self-assessment is a crucial practice to provide a structured approach to reflect on progress, refine goals, and develop strategies for future success.

## METHODOLOGY

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program's annual Self-Assessment was conducted January 22, 2024, through February 2, 2024. The Office of Head Start Focus Area One Protocol was used in this year's 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**

Martha Rodriguez

Elizabeth Gonzalez

Josette Ramirez

**Child Development**

Connie Casas

Nadia De Leon

Hector Guerra

Yolanda Castillo

**Special Services**

Sonia Balderas

Emmarlyn Villegas

Mirna Gonzalez

**ERSEA/Family and Community**

Ramiro Silva

Debra Gamboa

Cidelia Monteagudo

Abigail Fuente

**Child Health and Safety**

Yesenia Quintanilla

Samuel Padron

Maria Martinez

Paulita Gonzalez

**Child Nutrition**

Gilbert Silva

Cristina Garza

Aurora Figueroa

**Transportation/Field Operations**

Azucena Saenz

**Human Resources**

Marissa Reyes

Herlinda Hernandez

Christina Gutierrez

Each aspect of the program was carefully examined, and the outcomes were 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.

## PARENT PARTICIPATION

The Program extends its appreciation to the one-hundred and forty (140) 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's vocabulary has improved considerably, also noting that children are expressing themselves clearly and in complete sentences. Socialization among peers and family members has increased and children are more actively involved in group play, learning to share, and effectively communicating their feelings. Children are acquiring Early Learning Skills in Language Development, Cognition, Social and Emotional Development, Numeracy and Literacy, and Curiosity and Exploration.

### **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:

- Would like to see children learn to read.
- Develop self-help skills.

- Participate in more physical activities.
- More English language development
- Have more take-home activities.

**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 and parent conferences are taking place. Parents expressed that visits are very informative and that teachers share children's assessment reports and offer suggestions on what to focus on at home.

**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****FISCAL****How does the Program engage stakeholders in the budget development process?**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program's (HCHSP) budget development process begins during the month of May. Department Directors receive a budget memorandum from the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the Program Executive Director which indicates a scheduled time to meet with the CFO to plan individual department's (*Administration, Personnel, Finance, Procurement, MIS, Field Operations, Health, Family Services, Disability, Education, Community Partnerships, Compliance, Pre-K Collaboration, and Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) Nutrition*) budgetary needs. Included with the memorandum is a budget package which contains the following:

- Budget Worksheet
- Current and previous year-to-date department encumbrance budget reports
- Technical and Training Assistance (T&TA) Form
- Budget Needs and Assessment Form
- Vehicle Purchase Request Form
- Large Equipment Request Form
- Small Equipment Purchase Form

- Training and Travel Summary
- Forms (i.e., office supplies, medical supplies, playground equipment, etc.)

Department Directors prepare a preliminary budget for his/her department utilizing the budget packet prior to meeting with the CFO. The department directors meet with the Program Director, Assistant Program Directors, and the CFO to discuss their budgetary needs. Budget line items are discussed to ensure that appropriate funding is secured to meet the needs for Head Start services. A consolidated proposed budget with supporting documentation is prepared for review by the Budget Committee. The Budget Committee is comprised of the Executive Director, Assistant Program Directors, and four Policy Council members. The documentation provided to the Budget Committee contains the following:

- Letter from the Administration of Children and Families, Office of Head Start
- Budget Memorandum to Hidalgo County Policy Council & Grantee Board
- Proposed Head Start Budget and Proposed TDA Budget
- Proposed Salary Scale
- Proposed Budget Graph by Department
- The number of budgeted positions in each department
- Yearly Budgeted Positions

The Budget Committee meets to review, discuss, approve, and answer any questions regarding the proposed budget and supporting documentation.

Once the Budget Committee has approved the proposed budget, the budget is then presented to the Policy Council for approval. Upon approval by the Policy Council, the Executive Director

presents the budget to the Grantee Board (Commissioner's Court) for final approval and submission.

It is the procedure of Hidalgo County Head Start Program to obtain final budget approval 90 days before the beginning of the Program's calendar year. The budget is submitted electronically via the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES) at [www.hses.ohs.acf.hhs.gov](http://www.hses.ohs.acf.hhs.gov) no later than September 30<sup>th</sup>.

The accounting procedures manual clearly outlines the budget development process and describes how the governing body, and the policy council are engaged in the budget development process.

**How does the Program use the financial management system to capture actual-to-budgeted costs monthly?**

Actual-to-budgeted costs are captured utilizing a Monthly Encumbrance Budget Report which includes total budgeted appropriations by budget line-item category, year to date encumbrances, year to date expenditures, year to date budget balances and monthly expenditures. The Fiscal department monitors expenditures utilizing a detailed budget encumbrance report and compares actual expenditures with appropriated balances in each budget line item. Encumbrance reports are monitored monthly by Fiscal staff.

**How does the Program regularly examine and address the financial impact of emerging program needs and changes?**

The Senior Management Team (Executive Director, Assistant Program Directors, and Program's Chief Officers) meet weekly on Monday mornings to discuss areas of concern, progress, and year to date status regarding delivery of services to children and families. The Senior Management Team discusses upcoming services and/or needs i.e., staffing, transportation, education curriculum,

state certifications, budgeting and target spending rates and trends, safety equipment needs, technology, etc.

The Fiscal department submits a monthly encumbrance budget report to all Department Directors for review. They monitor their respective budget reports to gauge revenues and expenditures accordingly. The Policy Council also receives a monthly budget encumbrance report for approval every month.

**Has the Program developed and maintained written fiscal policies and procedures? Explain.**

The Program has developed sound fiscal systems to effectively manage grant awarded funds and ensure that the management team and fiscal staff work together to support the delivery of Head Start services.

The Program has established written accounting procedures which outline the financial management systems that ensure budget management, human resources management, financial reporting, payroll, general ledger, fixed assets inventory, electronic requisitions and purchase order processing, accounts payable, encumbrances, forms designer, journal entries and financial resources management. The procedures incorporate strong internal controls to ensure and safeguard financial resources including fixed assets inventory.

In March 2021, the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Office of Grants Management (OGM) conducted an Enhanced Federal Review to examine the Fiscal Policies and Procedures Manual. The purpose of the review was to determine if the policies under 45CFR Part 75 and the Government Accountability Office's Standards for Internal controls in the Federal Government (GAO Green Book) were identified accordingly in the Fiscal Manual. The OGM provided three areas of recommendations which were subsequently included in the Fiscal Manual. There were no deficiencies noted as per letter dated June 26, 2023, from the ACF OGM Office.

**Does the Program promote separation of financial responsibilities? Explain.**

Yes, the Program's financial management systems provide for effective internal controls which include the separation of financial responsibilities. The Fiscal policies and procedures described in the manual clearly indicate the processes which entail separation of duties amongst the staff and prior approvals by the Chief Financial Officer. The finance staff is properly trained to adhere to the implemented procedures.

All transactions and fiscal responsibilities within the Finance Department which include bank reconciliations, journal entries, preparing checks, voiding checks, employment taxes, request for funds, payroll processing, financial reporting, accounts payables, In-kind etc., contain supporting documentation and proper approvals including the separation of financial responsibilities by Fiscal staff. Bank reconciliations, for example, are approved by the Chief Financial Officer to ensure that outstanding checks are cashed within 30 days and that the general ledger concurs with the bank statement balance. Checks are always secured under lock and key. Journal entries are approved by the Chief Financial Officer to ensure that proper documentation is provided and that journal entries are prepared correctly. Transactions are posted only upon approval of the Chief Financial Officer.

Yearly audits are conducted by the independent auditor to ensure that policies and procedures which incorporate strong internal controls and separation of duties are adhered to.

**Does the Program maintain an automated accounting system for financial information and personal costs? Explain.**

The Program utilizes the Micro Information Products (MIP) Fund Accounting Software to maintain financial information and personal data collection capable of producing timely and accurate reports. With the use of MIP, the Program ensures Budget Management, Human

Resources Management, Financial Reporting, Payroll, General Ledger, Fixed Assets Inventory, Electronic Requisitions and Purchase Order Processing, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Bank Reconciliation, Direct Deposit, Electronic Funds Transfer for Accounts Payable, Encumbrances, Forms Designer, Journal Vouchers and Financial Resources Management.

**How does the Program document cost for goods and services that are necessary and reasonable?**

Every department is responsible for initiating an electronic purchase requisition when goods and services are needed. Department Directors submit the electronic purchase requisitions to the Procurement Department for review, approval, and processing. The Procurement Department assigns a purchase order number to the corresponding electronic purchase requisition upon determination that items for purchase are necessary, reasonable, and allocated appropriately as stated in CFR §75.403 Regulations Factors affecting allowability of costs. Goods and services are carefully reviewed to ensure that they are necessary for program performance.

Upon approval from the Procurement Director, the purchase order is then submitted to the Finance Department for an additional review and approval by the Chief Financial Officer. Once the Chief Financial Officer approves the purchase order and concludes that goods and services are necessary and reasonable, a final review and approval is required by the Assistant Program Director.

**How does the Program ensure costs are allocated appropriately?**

All costs for goods and services are allocable, necessary to the overall operation of the Head Start Program and are in accordance with the Notice of Award. Purchase orders are coded accordingly with a Fund, Function, General Ledger Account Code, Location, and Department Number utilizing MIP Accounting Software.

**How does the Program track administrative costs and non-federal match?**

MIP enables the Program to easily track Program and Administrative Costs, revenues, expenditures, non-federal match, and direct costs. Administrative Costs are recorded in MIP utilizing a Function Account Code (10) that can easily be tracked. Non-Federal Match is recorded in the financial statements as a revenue account and an expense account that can easily be tracked.

**Identify areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards in your department.**

- Abila MIP Fund Accounting Software is utilized for budgeting, financial reporting, electronic requisitioning, general ledger, payroll, 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 for error, and enables the separation of duties.
- EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer) module was recently implemented for submitting online electronic payments to vendors.
- School district partnerships generate approximately \$5.4 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 \$3.8 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.
- Strong collaboration with the County of Hidalgo Purchasing Department.

**What are Critical Areas of concern your team has identified?**

- Time keeping implementation for electronic time sheets is an area of concern. Electronic time keeping would save time and effort, increase productivity and accuracy, and minimize error and data entry.
- A travel log software Program is highly recommended for staff traveling to and from centers for Program business.
- High rising benefits costs for Employee Health Insurance (an unprecedented 23% increase this year).

**What strategies has your team identified to address concerns:**

**Where are we now?**

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

- A Biometric Time Clock system is currently in the stages of implementation and fiscal staff is working diligently to launch the new Biometric Time Clock system for the Program.
- The fiscal staff is also in the process of meeting with a Trip Log software representative to explore the possibilities of implementing travel software to keep track of travel time and travel destinations for Program staff.

- The administration intends to utilize the remaining funds from the COLA to offset some of the costs for employee health insurance after all funds are distributed accordingly.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

### **Does the program maintain an active arrangement with a mental health consultant? Explain.**

The program maintains an active arrangement of Mental Health experts by employing three professional counselors with a master's degree certified by the state, two of which are working on acquiring an additional certification as Licensed Professional Counselor's. These employees service our Head Start children from Monday through Friday between 8:00 to 5:00.

A Licensed Professional Counselor is being contracted to perform classroom observations for the Spring of 2024. The official start date is February 13 to begin doing on-site class observations. The Groves Assessment & Psychotherapy practice from 2616 Buddy Owens Blvd. McAllen, Texas 78504 has been contracted for this purpose.

### **How does the Program use the mental health consultant to provide consultation and observation to support program staff to meet the mental health and social-emotional needs of children?**

The Mental Health Counselors (MHC) perform Fall and Spring observations to detect potential behavioral concerns and targets areas of social-emotional need to provide support to teaching staff, children, and their families.

The MHC takes on a holistic approach during classroom observations to identify any lapse within the classroom environment, teaching practices, children's ability to adapt to instruction, peer socialization and extent of capacity for oral language development opportunities as well as individualizing teaching practices to meet children with specific/delayed concerns.

The MHC consults with Head Start staff, children, and families to provide self-care techniques and in-class support, as needed, should the need extend to the home.

The Program allows MHC to share information on Employee Health Insurance opportunities to all employees to enhance their social-emotional well-being and self-care with zero to minimal cost to them through various agencies. The Employee Assistance Program, available through our Hidalgo County's Health and Wellness Program; as well as Tele- Health, AbleTo Behavioral Care Program, and others offered through our insurance carrier Aetna.

**Does the Program use various methods and approaches to build skills and capacity of all staff who regularly interact with children? Explain.**

The program conducts various methods and approaches to building skills and capacity of all staff by providing BOY training on the value of Positive Behavior Support implementation which are on-going throughout the year as we get new hires.

The MHC performs continuous campus visits to monitor strategy implementation and review any needs to modify or change strategies to fit the concern at hand with teaching staff.

The program provides opportunities for teachers/staff to participate in numerous trainings offered by our district partners and outside agencies such as Region One to acquire new information on topics that enhance teaching staff knowledge on Potential Challenging Behaviors and Social-Emotional skill building through research-based practices.

The program utilizes informational flyers, monthly interactive activities to promote self-care and mental wellness to administration, campus staff, our children, and their families.

The Hidalgo County Wellness Program provides ongoing virtual training on different topics to promote Mental Health and Wellness opportunities at a more personal level with employees willing and wanting to make a real change in their lifestyles. These links are shared with campuses monthly for staff to break away for 15 minutes and listen. A 24-hour gym is available to all Hidalgo County employees at no cost to them.

The MHC's do daily check ins through on-site visits or phone calls to see how the staff is doing, to see if supports are needed, and to do follow-ups on children being monitored for behavior concerns.

Depending on time, the MHC may do on-site selfcare activities with staff after children are gone for the day to promote campus climate and provide valuable information on overall workplace wellness and stress reducing techniques.

**Does the Program prohibit the use of expulsion in response to children's behavior? Explain.**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program prohibits expulsion by any means and instead works with the Rapid Response Team (RRT) to develop a plan of action to offer support in social-emotional and wellness areas that may be affecting the children with challenging behaviors.

The RRT (one professional from each department) conducts observations to provide support to class staff either through PBS strategies, meal adjustments, health monitoring, and more depending on individual child's behavioral and self-care needs.

With collaboration from districts, both entities have dual participation in the decision making to address challenging behaviors and equally share in the resources available and responsibilities rendered to children and their families.

The Program collaborates through staffing not only with Head Start employees on best strategies to use considering child's developmental age, but with parents to provide tools and resources for implementation at home.

For children with an active IEP or an IFSP, the Program consults with the local agency (ISD) responsible for implementing IDEA to ensure the child receives the needed support services.

If the child does not have an IFSP or IEP, we collaborate, with parent consent; with the local agency (ISD) responsible for implementing IDEA to determine a child's eligibility for services.

If, after all measures have been explored and proper documentation of all efforts is done, the Program, in consultation with the parents, the child's teacher, the agency responsible for IDEA implementation, the MHC determines the child's continued enrollment presents a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children and determines the Program is not the most appropriate placement for the child, the Program must work with such entities to directly facilitate the transition of the child to a more appropriate placement.

**Does the Program prohibit and/or severely limit the use of suspension in response to children's behavior? Explain.**

The Program prohibits or severely limits the use of suspension due to a child's behavior and may only be temporary in nature.

In extraordinary circumstances, and as a last resort where there is a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications and after all resources and external agencies have been considered and/or exhausted, this action may be the only appropriate placement.

If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, the MHC helps the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety by continuing to engage with the parents. The MHC contacts the families and evaluates the need to refer the child to outside agencies for added behavioral support.

The Program develops a written plan to document the action and support needed. The MHC conducts home visits and determines whether the child and/or family would benefit from a referral to an outside agency for added support.

The Program efforts to circumvent this step is to work with the RRT to develop a Plan of Action to ensure the child is receiving support in all areas being affected due to an undiagnosed disability or social-emotional disturbance caused by other external factors and we are in constant communication with families to provide resources and support where needed.

**Does the Program develop and implement developmentally appropriate behavior guidance and positive discipline policies and practices? Explain.**

At the start of the year, the Mental Health Department conducts multiple training sessions, one of which is The Devereux's Social-Emotional Screener to detect early delays in protective factors dealing with Resilience.

Positive Behavior Support Training is done at the start of the year with emphasis on research-based strategies to teach children coping skills regarding challenging behaviors.

The Program utilizes the Conscious Discipline Curriculum to enhance and incorporate social-emotional skill building into daily lessons in all core areas throughout the day to practice, promote, and prevent negative classroom outcomes.

The Program develops, implements, and monitors BIP or MHI/AP to support teachers and children with strategies or tools daily in the classroom.

The Program allows the MHC to conduct 20-minute mini-guidance lessons with classrooms once a month to actively engage children to early exposure of Good Character Trait building and awareness of good vs bad behaviors using multiple tools such as bibliotherapy, visuals, videos, and such.

**Identify areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards in your department.**

- Communication: The MH department and counselors work closely with campus staff, parents, and children through verbal communication and via/e-mail to ensure that documentation is accurate, meetings are held immediately with families to address issues of children in need of behavioral intervention for services are rendered promptly and continuously.
- Facilitation: Upon notice of a concern and after an observation has been conducted to target areas of need, the MH counselor facilitates immediate access to MH services and resources to staff, the children, and their families. This may include a referral to an external source.
- Monitoring: The MH department monitors the e-Deca Social-Emotional screener daily to decipher children that are due, past due, or need justification as to why children tested late. This tool has a compliance timeline of 45 days from the first day of enrollment. The MH department staff collaborate with campus staff and send reminders of deadlines coming up, updates needed and/or corrections on the Go Engage data system. This practice is on-going throughout the year.

- Customize and Prioritize: The MH counselor schedules, prioritizes, and customizes strategies and resources for teaching staff, children, and families focusing on individualization based on observed behaviors and parent/teacher input.

**What are Critical Areas of concern your team has identified?**

- Ongoing training to address challenging behaviors and to provide strategies that staff can implement immediately upon their return to the classroom.
- Employee Wellness to continue checking in with campus staff to address immediate concerns regarding self-care, attendance, and campus climate.
- E-Deca strategy implementation and monitoring.
- All Head Start staff safeguard and follow the Mental Health Process with fidelity when a child with challenging behaviors emerges.

**What strategies has your team identified to address concerns:**

- TOT sessions for the Education Area Directors, Mental Health counselors/coordinator, and Disability coordinators to then disperse them to train campus staff at assigned centers.
- Continue using and sharing links from outside consultants (OHS) with free virtual training on topics relating to children with social-emotional and behavioral needs.
- Continue allowing MHC and/or EAD to participate in Region One training to return and train their campus staff on newly acquired skills related to Challenging Behaviors and strategy Implementation.
- Bring in consultants to do training for challenging behaviors (1 per semester) on updated practices for PBS to fit today's behavior trends.

- Have Head Start staff attend ISD training on related topics for children with special needs if campuses/district render permission.
- Get staff input on campus concerns/needs by providing feedback opportunities to improve campus climate through questionnaires.
- Get staff input and autonomy on areas of interest regarding Self-Care and Wellness through surveys to be done electronically once per semester. Create monthly informational flyers that include tips on chosen topics to increase campus morale and influence opportunities to self-monitor set goals that deliver lifestyle changes.
- The MH department will develop a guide of set strategies from the e-Deca screener for immediate implementation that teachers will include and update MONTHLY into lesson plans. This practice will allow Campus Directors and Family Service Workers a guide on which strategies to monitor during classroom walkthroughs and to have consistency and continuity of implementation across the board.

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

- The Program uses a source of PBS from 2008 with updates done by self-initiated research on current strategies and practices or trends to develop a solid support system to address challenging behaviors.
- The Mental Health department provides immediate MH support to all HS staff, children, and families.
- The department monitors all functions within the Go-Engage data system and inputs/updates all documentation on individual student basis using the Social-Emotional Tab for referrals and screener monitoring purposes.
- MH department staff provide training to new employees within 10 days of hire.

- Refer children to a LEA for evaluations when deemed necessary based on a suspected delay as well as offer referrals to outside agencies for the child exhibiting continued behavioral concerns and/or for the family to support them when everyone in the home is affected due to uncontrollable situations.

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

- Be able to implement the Mental Health Process with fidelity and accuracy through training provided by the Mental Health Department.
- Monitor Go Engage data system with accuracy for children who present concerns on the Social-Emotional Assessment Screener and send out reminders 10 and 5 days prior to 45-day deadlines to FSW's and CD's to diminish red/blue flags.
- Get complete training from a Go Engage expert to learn concrete program usage on general case management, the gathering of reports, with the primary intent of knowing the absolute location to input information for all aspects of our department with 100% accuracy while gaining credit for PIR simultaneously.
- Decide on ONE Social-Emotional Tool/Program to follow where research-based strategies are readily accessible to implement across all campuses with children exhibiting challenging behaviors.

## **CHILD HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **How does the Program determine that all children have ongoing sources of health care and health insurance coverage within 30 days?**

During the enrollment process, pertinent information and documents are collected from parents. For example, parents are asked about the child's medical provider and medical insurance. If a child

is identified as not having a medical home or insurance, the staff gives parents a list of local health community resources. Children who still do not meet any of the requirements are directed to community partners for appropriate treatment and health examinations if deemed necessary. If families do not have legal status in the US, they are directed to Nuestra Clinica del Valle (low income - sliding fee scale clinic), to establish a medical home. Families without insurance are advised to apply for Medicaid/Chip or go to Hidalgo County Indigent Health Care Program for assistance. If Medicaid/Chip is denied, the Medicaid denial letter is requested from the parent(s) for Hidalgo County Head Start Program to assist in paying for any medical or dental treatments that their child may need.

**How does the Program confirm that a health care provider has made initial determination of medical and oral care for all the children within 90 days?**

The 90-day deadlines are helpful in tracking the health services for children. Health Services Staff and campus staff assist parents to obtain the necessary paperwork from health and dental providers before the deadline. The Go Engage program and monthly reports are useful for keeping up to date with campuses. The Health Services department will print condensed summary reports, vaccination report, and other reports to ensure that all needed health requirements are fulfilled. These reports are emailed, faxed, or delivered to the campuses to help staff identify any past dues, abnormal values, or anything that may be due soon. Staff at the campuses make sure that parents make the required arrangements to take their children for follow ups if anything abnormal is identified or missing. Staff will send notices and check the records by monitoring GoEngage. The Health Services department carefully monitors PIR and Pop reports on GoEngage

**How does the Program monitor vision and hearing screenings for all children within 45 days?**

During enrollment parents are asked to bring in a physical exam which includes vision and hearing screenings by the medical provider, those results are immediately entered to the child's file on GoEngage. Also, by continuously monitoring POP reports, the hearing and vision reports are downloaded and are monitored by the health services department nurses and staff. Campus staff are trained to run reports and to monitor these services. If children are found to be missing a hearing or a vision exam, Head Start staff are certified by the state and can screen children before the 45-day deadline and enter the results to GoEngage to comply with the deadline. The Program also collaborates with health care professionals to conduct these required screenings during the child's physical examination.

**How does the Program support children and families to become up to date on preventive medical and oral health care?**

Hidalgo County Head Start has MOU's with different community partners: medical/dental providers who provide services to children. Some of these providers offer pro bono services as applicable or available. Parents with no medical or dental care are encouraged to apply for Medicaid/Chip benefits or are given a list of community resources they can reach out too. Children in need of services are referred to low-cost medical services such as Nuestra Clinica del Valle, and the County Health department. Staff also schedule appointments with Ashley Pediatrics or Dr. Orfanos which take their mobile units to offer health care services on site at the campuses.

Staff will coordinate services by seeking and addressing the child/family needs and refer the families to outside agencies as needed. Children Files are reviewed to identify if any follow-ups are required. Communication among departments takes place as needed to support the child and

family. Staff collaborate with local health care professionals to facilitate access to preventive services, family workshops, and onsite staff training. Education is also provided to parents on the importance of taking an active role in their child's medical and oral health care needs. Regular meetings are scheduled until the required service is complete or arrangements for suitable follow-up care are made.

**How does the Program track referrals and follow-up services for children who were identified through the screening process?**

Referrals are tracked through GoEngage monitoring system to ensure that services for health, oral, social, emotional, and developmental concerns are identified and followed through in a timely manner. Referrals are made to the pertinent area (internal and external) for health – medical or oral needs. Follow-up notes must be completed within 30 days after the first referral. Staff continue to collaborate and communicate with parents and dental/physicians' offices to ensure that appropriate follow-up occurs. Staff provide parents with monthly notices, phone calls, home visits and must document parental responses on go-engage case notes. The health services department will continuously monitor the child's records for medical/dental documentation or orders and will support staff as needed.

**Does the Program provide training on health and safety practices and expectations to staff?**

**Explain.**

The program offers trainings on health and safety practices annually during the beginning of each school year, during preservice and as need throughout the year to validate that all staff, have sufficient knowledge and experience to fulfill the health roles and responsibilities and to ensure that high-quality services are delivered to all families. Staff is trained on the following Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS):

- Safe medication administration

- Hearing and Vision (receive state certification)
- CPR
- Height and Weight
- Blood pressure monitoring
- How to handle emergencies

**Does the Program follow a process to ensure that all violations of supervision, unauthorized release, and/or inappropriate discipline are reported to the Regional Office in a timely manner? Explain.**

Yes, the Program does follow a process that ensures that all violations of supervision, unauthorized release and/or inappropriate discipline are reported to the Regional Office in a timely manner by following policy guidelines and protocols:

- If necessary, call 911.
- Prompt notification of incident to parent
- Proper documentation of the incident
- Follow chain of command and ensure prompt notification to Head Start Compliance Director, Assistant Director, and Executive Director as per policy.
- Notification to the Office of Head Start within seven (7) days of incident.

**Has the Program established systems to identify potential safety risks daily and ongoing including exposure to lead in paint and water? Explain.**

Yes, systems are in place to identify potential safety risks daily and ongoing by doing the following:

- Conduct periodic workplace inspections to identify any new hazards.
- Bottled water is provided by the Program for drinking and/or cooking.

- The Program provides (nontoxic – paint free) toys for children.
- A lead questionnaire is provided to parents at enrollment and must be brought in before the 90-day deadline or lead blood test results to identify if children are at risk of lead exposure.
- Collaborate with Victoria Jacobs, Outreach Coordinator for a program that is provided by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality’s (TCEQ) Lead Testing in School and Childcare Program (LTSCC). This is a voluntary statewide program that offers free training and guidance on how to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water where children are cared for. Financial support is made possible by the TCEQ and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This program will provide training on collection of water for testing and the results.
- Testing for lead in paint will also be conducted through the utilization of purchasing Pro Lab Instant Lead Surface Test Kits, which is an efficient tool designed to detect lead presence in various painted areas within our facilities.

**How does the Program conduct preventive maintenance and corrects identified safety issues?**

To correct identified safety issues, the Program conducts the following preventive measures:

- Routine inspections of facilities to identify any potential safety hazards.
- Daily playground checklist by staff
- Monthly monitoring of classrooms
- Monthly fire drills
- Severe weather evacuation drills
- If concerns are identified, work orders are submitted by the staff in collaboration with the maintenance team to provide prompt repair of the identified issue(s).

The goal of the staff is to always monitor children in a holistic way to provide the best services Head Start can offer. Families are always encouraged to keep their children healthy and safe.

**Identify areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards in your department.**

Areas identified where the program is working well are as follows:

- Mandatory Vision and Hearing State screening certification - the goal is to equip campus directors, family services workers and nurses to facilitate the service to the Head Start families.
- Communicable disease training is provided to all employees so that they are aware of the early signs and symptoms of when to keep a child out of school.
  - 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 returned to the campus 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.
- Medication administration training is also provided to all employees.
  - Staff are trained in how to administer medications to children by following doctor's orders.
  - Staff are trained to follow Head Start protocols in case of a medical emergency while on the campus.
  - The staff is also trained on how to document, scan, and enter all health information to the child's GoEngage file.

- Staffing is held to discuss a child’s condition with the parent(s) and having the opportunity to educate the staff on what to expect in relation to the child’s signs and symptoms. Parents are also reassured that the staff at the centers are trained in how to administer medication.

**What are Critical Areas of concern your team has identified?**

- Referral process and Follow ups are not being completed or followed through on time by the staff as directed by Health Services 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 or past due vaccines.
- The number of parents refusing to meet mandatory standards is increasing (i.e. public school district children without Physicals, dentals, blood level readings) - Parents are always encouraged and educated on the benefits of immunizing their children, health, and dental care needs.

**What strategies has your team identified to address concerns:**

These are strategies implemented by the Health Services department staff to address health concerns:

- Nurses visit their assigned campuses to monitor and review the child’s GoEngage records/file, to address any health concerns.
- Nurses continuously monitor immunization reports, immtrac2, and enter immunizations on GoEngage to make sure children’s vaccines are up to date.
  - Immunization reports are generated, highlighted, and emailed or taken to the campus staff. Campus staff give parents a “parent notice” so they can take their children to get the missing/past due immunizations as soon as possible.

- Nurses assist staff and parents in obtaining children’s missing medical/dental information by calling medical and dental offices or going to medical or dental offices to pick up the information.
- Nurses assist in running monthly reports or as needed for the center staff. (i.e. condensed health summary reports with highlighted missing information, abnormal tests/exams, or if any correction must be entered properly).
- Nurses refer parents to the County Health Department, Community Resources List, Low income (sliding fee scale) medical and dental clinic: Nuestra Clinica del Valle.
- Coordinate mobile unit clinics with Ashley Pediatrics and Dr. Orfanos.
- Continuously educate parents and staff as needed.
- Organize mandatory Medication administration training.
- Coordinate mandatory hearing and vision certification for staff.
- Refer parents without insurance or a medical home to “Nuestra Clinica del Valle so when they leave Head Start the children have an established medical and dental home for their healthcare needs.

**Where are we now?**

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

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

- Hidalgo County Head Start is transitioning from paper documentation to paperless. Changes include learning the new system properly and educating the staff on how and where to scan or enter specific health-related information.
- The Health Services department continues to educate all new employees on how to administer first aid or when to call 911 in case of an emergency and familiarize them with signs and symptoms to look for.
- 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 hearing, as well as acute emergency care.
- Make sure that children leave Head Start with an established medical home.
- Improve communication with center staff to keep all health timeframes in place to meet our 30-45-90-day deadlines.
- Continue to educate staff to be able to meet all health required standards.

Once all health-related paperwork is completely entered into Go Engage, the staff will be able to access a child's records and reports quicker, allowing them to follow up in 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 Services department nurses and the campus staff are responsible for coordinating care by continuously communicating with the child's family and their health care providers so that they can stay healthy and ready to learn.

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT

**Does the Program use a researched-based curriculum appropriate for all provided program options and trains staff to support their understanding of the curricula? Explain.**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program, (HCHSP), is committed to delivering services for low-income children and families to be ready for kindergarten, and beyond. The Program currently collaborates with 9 surrounding school districts in Hidalgo County to ensure that the mission and vision of "Breaking the cycle of poverty and literacy," is fulfilled and lived. It offers a full day Prek-3 and Prek-4 in 30 campuses. Head Start is committed to ensuring the implementation of the following three curriculum programs that are adopted by the different districts served: Frog Street, Three Cheers and Pre-K On My Way. Other instructional resources utilized to complement the core curriculum are the following: Ignite by Hatch, and Circle Activity Collection. All these early childhood education curriculum programs and supplemental resources include a comprehensive scientifically-research based scope and sequence for literacy, math, and content domains. Acknowledging the individual needs of all learners, these curricula, also include strategies for differentiated instruction and adapting for special needs and English learners and more. In addition, they offer developmental and learning continuums that allow children to build on previously mastered skills to achieve new skills more readily in a seamless and continuous manner, while addressing cognitive, language, literacy, physical, and social emotional developmental domains of each child. Furthermore, it's important to note that daily lesson plans reflect carefully planned activities that clearly support children's individual needs, abilities and learning styles with teacher nurturing interactions and a focused lens on developmentally appropriate academic lessons addressing the five central domains from the Head Start Early Outcomes Framework, (HSELOF), which include; Language and Literacy, Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to

Learning, Cognition and Perpetual, Motor, and Physical Development. These lessons offer multisensory pre-reading interactive, digital content that supports bilingual learners and children with special needs. Unique in their own way, they also provide instructional materials and resources to address children's needs. These curriculum programs clearly indicate the alignment with HSELOF, and the Texas Pre-K Guidelines as required by the state and the federal standards.

The following are the instructional research-based curriculum programs that support the five central domains from HSELOF:

*Frog Street Pre-K* curriculum contains an organized scope and sequence/pacing guide that progressively builds children's knowledge and skills as they move through the developmental progressions. Classroom staff use the weekly Frog Street lesson plans to individualize instruction and they have the flexibility to adjust the lessons to address children's learning based on their needs. The objective of the lessons remains the same throughout the program, however, teachers are required to adjust lessons, activities, and materials to ensure that children's needs are met. In addition, as indicated on the daily schedule, a 45-minute block is allocated to specifically support children to develop language skills. Children are grouped intentionally according to language and individual needs during language and literacy throughout the day, supported by many digital resources and packed with hundreds of ideas to become active participants.

*Three Cheers* is a purposefully, play-based curriculum where learning is initiated through skills-based experiences and structured around quality children's literature. It has Nine Ready-to-go theme kits containing developmentally appropriate learning experiences across all skill domains around the big idea. It highly focuses on early literacy, family engagement, while establishing a habit of reading at home. It provides creative options for theme-specific centers that are routine-oriented plus simple ideas to refresh center activities throughout each theme. In addition, it

includes hundreds of interactive digital gaming opportunities which help develop letter recognition, letter-sound, knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and math number recognition. The classroom schedule reflects the daily 45-minute implementation to support children as they develop their language and literacy skills. Children are grouped intentionally according to language and individual needs during language and literacy throughout the day.

*Pre-K On My Way* utilizes an engaging approach that helps every child develop the skills they'll need to flourish as readers, writers, and explorers of the world. This curriculum provides teachers with everything they need to engage their students in educationally rich, hands-on, and diverse activities throughout the academic year. Its lessons are very rich in language and vocabulary, which are taught for 45 minutes a day. The lesson plans provided are teacher friendly, and easy to deliver. They are developmentally appropriate with the flexibility to adjust and adapt to the needs of the children. Digital resources are also provided to supplement the lessons in the curriculum. *Pre-K On My way* is also provided in Spanish for our dual language students, (Uno, Dos, Tres, Pre-K). This comprehensive curriculum invites every child to take the first steps on their learning adventure through songs, games, and books. Its home connections provide families with ideas for at-home play, literature and writing prompts.

*Heggerty Phonological Awareness* provides children with consistent and repeated instruction which supports children in the development of decoding and encoding skills. It gives children the opportunity to practice alliteration, segmentation, on-set rhyme, rhyming, initial, medial, and ending sounds. All these skills are what students will be assessed on with the CIRCLE-Progress Monitoring tool. Heggerty is taught with fidelity and consistency for fifteen (15) minutes daily.

*Ignite by Hatch* is a digital learning platform that offers a play-based curriculum that engages,

instructs, and assesses student's skills in the broad areas of early learning and development. It builds on the skills of each student and is self-paced for individualized learning to ensure that students achieve kindergarten readiness. It is also directly aligned to the five domains of the HSELOF.

*Circle Activity Collection and Frog Street AIM* are two separate supplemental resource Pre-K programs that are used for individualization and teaching and learning. It includes five hundred (500) classroom lessons in English and in Spanish. The collections have tools that filter and save activities and provide ideas that help scaffold learning as needed. It supports teachers in the implementation using video examples, sample lesson scripts, scaffolding learning tips as needed. In addition, it also supports data-driven instructional planning through integration with the Circle Progress Monitoring System. These resources are aligned to the state Pre-k Guidelines and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

Furthermore, it's important to mention that teachers provide a print rich environment by labeling furniture, and items in the classroom as well as creating a word wall, and a student created alphabet, in both languages, (English and Spanish). Children are also exposed to environmental print such as names and logos of local stores, and restaurants. Also, the use of the language approach, whether in English or in Spanish, according to the language of the day, provide opportunities for children to recognize their spoken words by daily chants, nursery rhymes, bilingual pairs bilingual centers etc. Teachers use daily journals, and provide materials at the writing center, while exposing children to written daily messages on chart paper.

HCHSP validates and recognizes that a child's language is key to building strong readiness skills, cognitive, linguistic, social development as well as their long-term academic success. Therefore, our program implements and follows the Dual Language in accordance with each school district.

The model consists of children learning each language half of the time throughout the program while acquiring the second language by designating a target language to academic subjects also known as Language of Instruction, (LOI). To expose students to both languages orally, we have two days of the week in the first semester that we do all the incidentals in English, the other three days of the week are done in Spanish. The second semester we reverse, so that we create a balance in both languages. The classroom staff is trained in the different components of the model which include the following: Dual Language Model, Daily Schedule, Lesson Plan Procedures, Bilingual Learning Centers, and conceptual refinement. All the curricula mentioned are implemented using this dual language model.

To complement these curriculums, and to address children's needs, their abilities and learning styles, the Program selects activities and implements best teaching practices recommended by the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, (NCQTL). The Classroom Assessment Scoring System, (CLASS), is another tool used alongside the curriculum that provides opportunities to ensure that no child is left behind. This instrument measures the level of adult-child interaction to gauge and adjust the interaction between the adults and the children. As the adults in the classroom follow a child's lead, the interaction is both targeted and spontaneous. These resources, in conjunction with classroom schedule, ensure that opportunities for flexibility, small/large group instruction and spontaneous indoor and outdoor learning.

### **Training staff to support their understanding of the curricula?**

The Program ensures that teachers get the necessary training and professional development and a firm understanding of the curriculum and necessary strategies to support implementation. Training is provided district wide in the beginning of the year, by each school district's curriculum and instructional team. Trainings average about two and a half days. In addition to the school district's

training HCHSP also provides annual and preservice training that addresses the implementation of curriculum. These training courses consist of going over daily lessons, objectives, best teaching practices, strategies, the thematic units, as well as presenting all the resources that are part of the curriculum. Teachers are provided with the tools they need to implement the curriculum with fidelity. Training is an ongoing process that includes a variety of supports and coaching. To continue this process, the campus director holds professional learning community (PLC's) to discuss objectives, share ideas, best teaching practices and strategies. In addition, the campus directors are expected to conduct daily walk throughs, to ensure proper implementation. After each walk-through, the director meets with the teachers to provide feedback and to validate implementation and focus on areas of strength and needing improvement. It's imperative to provide supportive and constructive feedback to teachers so they understand what they are doing well, what they need to enhance their teaching and how to achieve their goals. This is done through the lens of a coaching model. Education Area Directors also continuously provide training for the campus directors, so that they internalize and disseminate information to the teachers.

### **What process does the Program use to monitor curriculum implementation?**

#### *Lesson Plans*

Teachers create weekly lesson plans identifying daily learning objectives, organizing resources, manipulatives, and materials, and instructional activities, while differentiating a plan to meet the needs of different student levels. In the process of creating the lesson plan, the teacher supports the curriculum by planning developmentally appropriate activities through:

- Higher order thinking
- Analysis and reasoning

- Experimentation and exploration
- Self/directed play and observation.
- Frequent conversations
- Repetition and extension activities
- Social Development
- Language Development
- Creativity in the Arts
- Chanting, dancing, singing.

### *Daily Schedules*

The daily schedules support the curriculum by allocating blocks of time to keep students engaged and on task. Students know what is happening now and what will come next. The daily schedule ensures that the staff has ample time to teach all components of the early learning domains that include Language/Literacy, Cognition, Social Emotional, Initiative, Curiosity and Creativity and Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development. In addition, the daily schedule also supports curriculum implementation by allowing opportunities for small and large group instruction, independent and teacher guided instruction, independent and teacher guided instruction and indoor and outdoor learning.

### *Walk-Throughs*

Walk-throughs support the curriculum by ensuring that teachers are following the scope and sequence as per the unit of study and learning objectives in the curriculum. The campus directors are required to conduct daily walk-throughs. After conducting a walk-through, the director provides supportive and constructive feedback on teaching practices and uses encouraging and

positive words and a coaching approach.

### *Individualization*

The teacher is required to individualize instruction based on the data collected from the Circle Progress Monitoring and Frog Street AIM tool. Teachers review and desegregate the data and create and form groups based on these results. Goals and objectives are developed to differentiate instruction. Teachers ensure that three rounds of individualization are conducted for 45 minutes per day.

### *Supplemental Resources*

The implementation of Heggerty Phonological Awareness, Ignite by Hatch, and Circle Activity Collection are other ways to supplement and support the curriculum.

**Explain how the program performs developmental screenings for all children within the prescribed timeframes using research-based tools.**

Hidalgo County Head Start Program utilizes the CIRCLE Progress Monitoring and Frog Street Assess, Instruct, Monitor (AIM) to assist teachers in making relevant educational decisions about children's progress and to enable them to develop instructional goals and objectives. CIRCLE Progress Monitoring and AIM are administered three (3) times a year. Wave 1 must be conducted within forty-five (45) days of enrollment. Wave 2 in January and Wave 3 in April. Desegregation of the data is conducted after every administration to provide teaching and learning support to all the teaching staff and campus leaders. The data is desegregated by age, special needs, second language learners, campus, classroom, child, etc.

The data from these tools is used to make instructional decisions for teaching and learning as well as individualization. The Beginning of Year (BOY) administration is used as a baseline for progress throughout the year. It gives the teacher vital information to prepare the lessons and activities for individualization in small groups and individual if necessary. The Middle of the Year (MOY) administrator measures the growth that children have made from BOY to MOY. Monitoring and adjustments are made in teaching and learning based on the results of the data. Right after each administration of the assessment teachers conduct a Parent Teacher Conference to go over the results and provide a Home-School Connection packet to support the children at home. The End of Year Results are used to evaluate teaching and learning practices and provide professional development or materials for the following school year. These results are also provided to the Policy Council Members.

The Chief Early Education Officer provides training to campus directors and classroom staff to analyze data using the CIRCLE Progress Monitoring, Frog Street AIM, and Ignite by Hatch by implementing the Gradual Release Model. The Gradual Release Model is a best practice instructional model where teachers strategically transfer the responsibility in the learning process from the teacher to the students. Typically, the model of teaching has four phases: I DO- where the teacher models the lesson objective in a focus lesson, WE DO- guided instruction with both input from the teacher and the students, YOU DO TOGETHER: Collaborative learning in small groups or partners and YOU DO ALONE- independent practice.

After completion of training, campus directors are responsible to generate and analyze the School Summary Report which indicates the scores for all measures assessed. This data is used to determine campus level of performance and to make relevant educational decisions. Furthermore, they are expected to follow the same model to train campus staff to determine their

classroom needs and provide individualization for children in need of additional support. Campus Directors monitor that individualization is provided based on the students' needs through daily walk-throughs and monitor and adjust as the students are progressing.

**Explain how the ongoing child assessment of children's progress is aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five.**

The Circle Progress Monitoring System as well as the Frog Street AIM are web-based user-friendly tools that enable classroom staff to quickly assess a child's progress. Circle-PM and AIM provide significant flexibility in administration, including choice of measures, assessment language (English and Spanish), timing of assessments and provides links to the CIRCLE Activity Collection and AIM Resources that target specific skills based on results. To cover all major objectives, Circle-PM and AIM have Direct and Observational Assessments.

Both Progress Monitoring tools are vetted through a rigorous state process to ensure that these tools are aligned to the Texas Pre-K Guidelines and the Head Start Program Performance Standards. As part of the vetting process all companies are required to include alignment documents for the state and Head Start Performance Standards and ELOF. These documents play a vital role for Teaching and Learning.

**How does the Program support staff to use teaching practices that are responsive, communicative, language rich, and promote critical thinking and persistence?**

- **Identifying staff training and professional development needs**

HCHSP identifies training and professional development needs by analyzing children's progress through CIRCLE Progress Monitoring and Frog Street AIM, by looking at teachers' performance through the CLASS lens during the four cycles of CLASS observations, and

through daily informal classroom observations/walkthroughs from Campus Directors and Administrators. In addition, the use of curriculum and resources such as, Scope and Sequence, Heggerty Phonological Awareness, Dual Language Program, Lesson Plans, Daily Schedules, Assessment tools etc., is evaluated and adjusted as needed on a yearly basis.

- **Program Planning**

HCHSP is currently using overall program data to determine systemic needs. The Education Department is taking the approach of the Gradual Release Model (I DO, We Do, You Do) to properly equip and build capacity in our current Campus Directors. We have developed a timeline of cluster training for Campus Directors to further develop their knowledge on data analysis and quality interactions in the classrooms. Resources such as CIRCLE Progress Monitoring, Ignite by Hatch, and CLASS data as well as training sessions and other online resources from the NCQTL platform will be used to support Campus Directors transition from managers to instructional leaders.

### **Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)**

CLASS observations remain an effective way to understand and measure the quality of interactions in the classrooms. During these times, children need supportive interactions from adults and their peers. Pertinent feedback on the observation is provided that strengthens the interactions between the children and classroom staff.

Observations are conducted once in the Fall and Spring in 2 cycles of observing and note-taking that last 20 minutes in length and 10 minutes to record findings. After conducting CLASS observations, Campus Directors provide feedback to all classroom staff. This data is used to identify priority teachers for Practice-based Coaching as well as professional development.

To improve adult-child interactions, CLASS Domains, Dimensions, Indicators, and Behavioral Markers were added to the Classroom Walk-through Form and the program developed Focus of the Week document to ensure efficacy of interactions in the classroom. Additionally, the Education Department provides continuous Pre-K CLASS Training which helps us reach our goal of having 100% of current campus directors and education staff as CLASS reliable observers.

After analyzing the results of the CLASS data for the Fall 2023 the education department and the Assistant Program Director concluded more support is needed in Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains. After desegregating the data by campus, the need for each campus varies. Eleven of the campuses need intensive professional development in Classroom Organization, 14 out of 30 centers need professional development intervention in Emotional Support. According to the data, Instructional Support is the strongest domain. The data will drive the Classroom Walk-throughs and Professional Development. The campus directors will be more intentional in the daily classroom walk-throughs and professional development based on the campus and teacher's CLASS results. Campus Directors will conference with the classroom staff, share the data gathered in the walk-throughs, and make recommendations.

**How does the Program individualize classroom practices to meet the needs of enrolled children, including dual language learners and children with disabilities?**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program (HCHSP) implements Frog Street, Three Cheers, and Pre-K On My Way. All three curricula are a comprehensive scientifically researched- based dual language curriculum that provides high-quality and age-appropriate instruction aligned to both federal and state standards. Lesson plans provide activities and materials that support children's individual needs, abilities, and learning styles. The lesson plans are tailored to large and small groups, individualization, direct instruction, child-initiated opportunities, free choice, indoor and

outdoor learning, and active and quiet learning. Other tools that HCHSP utilizes to support individual needs, abilities, and learning styles are the CIRCLE Progress Monitoring (C-PM) and Frog Street Assess, Instruct, Monitor (AIM). These assessments are administered three times a year and provide teachers with the data to identify strengths and areas for improvement for each individual child.

The use of technology is available to all students and HCHSP uses Ignite by Hatch. This is a digital learning platform that offers play-based curricular experiences that engage, instruct, and assess children's skills in the broad areas of early learning and development directly aligned to the five domains in the HSELOF. Ignite by Hatch builds on the skills of each child, is self-paced for individualized learning to ensure children achieve kindergarten readiness. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is another tool used alongside the curriculum that provides more opportunities to make sure that each child can succeed. CLASS measures the level of adult-child interaction to gauge and adjust the interaction between adults and children. As adults follow the child's lead, the interaction is both targeted and spontaneous.

### **How is the data from standardized observation tools used to improve teaching?**

HCHSP uses CIRCLE Progress Monitoring, Frog Street AIM, Hatch, and CLASS scores to plan for continuous improvement for quality teaching and learning. Data collected throughout the year will be analyzed at the end of the year to identify systemic issues, if any, in classroom management, learning environments and instructional formats to improve teaching practices and individualization of services. HCHSP analyzes data from formal observations using CLASS and informal walkthroughs conducted daily by Campus Directors and relevant administrators to plan for professional development. Currently CLASS data from Fall of 2023 shows Emotional Support and Classroom Organization as areas of support. Once we do Cycles 3 and 4 in the Spring, data

will be collected for the year and professional development needs will be determined for the 2024-2025 school year. Additionally, CLASS data is also utilized to strengthen individual classrooms by providing instructional coaching using the Practice-Based Coaching Model (PBC). Teachers in need of support are selected and prioritized based on CLASS scores and are assigned to an instructional coach for intensive coaching. All other staff receive additional walk-throughs from Campus Directors and the in-service suites to improve instruction. Resources such as CIRCLE Progress Monitoring, Frog Street AIM, and Ignite by Hatch as well as training sessions and other online resources from the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL) platform are also used to support teachers. Other benefits include opportunities to provide supportive and constructive feedback to reflect on their teaching practices.

**How does the Program individualize lesson plans and teaching strategies using child assessment data?**

Teachers utilize the Circle Progress Monitoring and Frog Street AIM tools, which are developmental, and research based, to make relevant instructional decisions about children's progress in the process. It is administered three times a year and it provides teachers with the data to identify student's strengths and areas of improvement for each individual child. Immediately after our first formal assessment, (Wave 1), teachers desegregate the data. The data establishes a baseline that helps teachers determine student's current level of performance and serves as a crucial factor for individualized instruction. Teachers create lesson plans that are tailored to address whole and small groups, and individualization. Small groups and learning centers are implemented where the staff ensures that scaffolding of concepts is done utilizing a different strategy and using hands on activities. The Circle Active Activity Collection and AIM lessons are tools utilized that supports data-driven instructional planning based on assessment results. These activities are

available in both languages, (English and Spanish), and supports teachers' implementation through videos, lesson plan scripts, scaffolding tips, and alignments to state guidelines and the Head Start Learning Outcomes Framework. Ignite by Hatch is another formal outcome-based program that collects real time data. It provides over 200 play-based curricular experiences allowing children to learn as they play while promoting a sense of autonomy. Classroom staff plan accordingly to provide opportunities for children to work on this self-paced educational digital application for at least 30 minutes a week. It is utilized as a resource to support individualized instruction during language and literacy, and math, through group rotations and learning centers. Furthermore, this digital tool automatically sets yearly goals to ensure children's progress and school readiness. HCHSP involves parents in supporting individualization based on oral language, early literacy, and academic skills by providing a bilingual at home curriculum. An At Home Daily Practice Folder is created by teachers utilizing the data that has been gathered. Parents can review language, literacy, and academic skills. The folder contains learning practices on Phonemic Awareness, Sight Words, Parts of a Book, Rhyming Words, Shapes, Numbers, Days of the Week and Months of the Year. Teachers model and explain to parents how to implement and roll out these activities during Teacher Nights, Parent Meetings, Parent-Teacher Conferences, and Home Visits. Parent Teacher Conferences are held three times a year after each assessment and are conducted in the parent's language of preference. During this conference, teachers share the data results. Together the teacher and the parents form a committee to develop the Child's Individual Plan, (CIP). This CIP is implemented, monitored, and adjusted throughout the year as needed. Home Visits are also conducted by classroom teachers twice a year or as needed to continue supporting children's educational needs.

**How does the Program individualize classroom environments to meet the needs of enrolled children?**

HCHSP fosters a learning environment where students feel comfortable and safe, while creating learning experiences that are interactive and sensitive to everyone's culture, beliefs, and language needs. For example, English Language learners are provided with appropriate and relevant resources to help them better connect with the curriculum and gain more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter when it's taught in their native language. Following the CLASS domain of Emotional Support, the teacher provides opportunities for students to actively discover, explore, learn, minimizing rigidity and promote a sense of self autonomy among children. Teachers make eye contact, use a warm calm voice and respectful positive language as they speak to children, while enhancing each student's identity and fostering a caring positive classroom environment that's conducive to effective learning. Teachers demonstrate a genuine interest in getting to know each student and their culture which helps establish trust, thus creating a bond with them so they may feel valued and appreciated. Acknowledging student's needs and differences, and creating a safe space for conversations, helps promote student success in the classroom and beyond. In addition to the social and emotional component, the classroom learning environment, also calls for maximizing instructional needs to address children's interest, unique learning styles, promoting cultural awareness always making teaching relevant, (regardless of the subject), and connecting to real world examples so that students may be able to relate and thus, be able to have better retention of the concepts being taught. Furthermore, classrooms reflect a full print rich environment, exhibiting an authentic student generated alphabet, word walls, labeling of furniture, and student work. All these are in both languages, (English and Spanish), to ensure student engagement and active participation. To sustain this active organized and positive

classroom environment, that supports curriculum implementation, teachers are also proactive by using a Management System, that promotes a sense of independence as they are given free choices during learning center time. Weekly lesson plans reflect all the individualized lessons as well as the learning objectives being taught. In ensuring individualized needs for our children with disabilities, they are fully provided with the necessary modifications to the environment, instruction, and individualized accommodations and support. Literature and posters relatable and depicting children with special needs, are given to staff to teach and support inclusion in the classroom. Additionally, classroom staff, in conjunction with parents, work diligently with eligible children that receive services under IDEA implementing IEP's. The curriculum, resources, lessons, activities, classroom environment, learning centers, daily schedules, etc. are in both English and Spanish to meet the needs of our Dual Language Learners.

**How does the Program use data from standardized observation tools to improve the quality of learning environments?**

HCHSP uses CLASS Observation data and the Literacy Checklist to improve the quality of learning environments. CLASS data is desegregated by program, campus, and individual classroom. The domains and indicators are used to determine where the needs are for improving teaching and learning. A locally developed Literacy Checklist is used to monitor the learning environments in the classroom. The Literacy Checklist is conducted in the Fall and Spring. The campus directors go into each classroom, complete the checklist, conference with the teachers, and provide supportive and constructive feedback on the results of the checklist. The campus directors monitor the recommendations for improvement during the daily classroom walk-throughs. The Program also utilizes instructional inventories to provide essential and developmentally appropriate instructional materials in all the classrooms to meet the needs of all learners. Tablets

and interactive boards are an integral part of daily teaching and learning. Children can use tablets to play instructional games that provide real-time data. The teachers, campus, and area directors and other administrative staff monitor children's progress via the Hatch Ignite web-based application.

HCHSP provides a learning environment conducive to learning and offers a safe place for children to succeed academically and feel safe mentally and physically. The classroom environment is supported by the teacher to reflect a warmth and respectful community with emotional connections between teachers and peers. As required in the CLASS domain of Emotional Support, the teacher provides opportunities for children to actively explore and learn, minimizing rigidity and promoting a sense of autonomy among children. Eye contact, proximity to children, a warm and calm voice, and respectful language are consistently being reinforced in the classroom. In addition to the social and emotional piece, the classroom environment is also maximized to meet instructional needs, children's interests, and abilities to learn from lessons. Classrooms are print-rich, and learning centers are available to support teaching and learning with various materials to keep children engaged. To sustain an organized and productive classroom environment that supports curriculum implementation, teachers anticipate problems by using a Management System in which cooperation and sharing are crucial to succeed.

Providing a daily schedule allows children to follow a consistent and predictable classroom schedule and routine. The daily schedule supports the curriculum by allocating blocks of time to ensure classroom staff has ample time to teach all components of the early learning domains that include Language/Literacy, Cognition, Social and Emotional, Initiative, Approaches to Learning and Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development. In addition, the daily schedule also supports curriculum implementation by having the flexibility to allow opportunities for small and

large group instruction, independent and teacher guided instruction and indoor and outdoor learning. The teacher consistently offers materials, provides time for children to participate, and plans developmentally appropriate activities in the daily schedule to encourage and support curriculum through:

- Higher order thinking
- Analysis and reasoning
- Experimentation and exploration
- Self/directed play and observation
- Frequent conversations
- Repetition and extension activities
- Social Development
- Language Development
- Creativity and the Arts

HCHSP is committed to creating and sustaining a print rich and literacy-friendly classroom environment that promotes and encourages the enrichment of children's communication and oral language development. Currently the learning centers in the Head Start classrooms are print rich and equipped with environmental print, writing materials and cultural books that support literacy and expand children's vocabulary alongside manipulatives and toys that elicit creativity and symbolic play. Another way in which classroom supports an enriched language environment is by intentionally labeling classroom furniture, materials, and other items around the room. Labels are in English and Spanish in the bilingual classrooms to address the needs of our Dual Language Learners. In addition, the classroom staff uses the language experience approach to provide opportunities for children to write and see

their spoken words using chart tablets, writing materials around the room, writing children's names in multiple places around the classroom, creating and reviewing a morning message daily and by encouraging children to trace, scribble and write in their own journals. Furthermore, Read Aloud/Story Time is another opportunity during the instructional day to enrich a child's vocabulary. As teachers read a book, new vocabulary is introduced to children, connecting real world experiences and familiar words to new more complex terminology. Before school starts, the Campus Director uses the HCHSP Literacy Checklist and goes into each classroom to ensure that they are Language and Literacy ready. Teachers have opportunities to work on the things that are missing from the checklist so that the room is ready for the children. Every center in the classroom includes reading and writing materials to incorporate literacy in each center. There is also a Library and Writing Center in each classroom. All these things in the classroom support and addresses language and early literacy for all the children.

### **How does the Program implement a comprehensive approach to professional development?**

HCHSP analyzes data from formal observations using CLASS and informal walkthroughs conducted daily by Campus Directors and relevant administrators to plan for professional development. Currently, CLASS data from Fall 2023 shows Emotional Support and Classroom Organization as areas in need of support. By the End of the school year, once a third and fourth round of CLASS data is collected, professional development needs will be determined for next school year. At this time, the Education Department will continue to conduct training and provide technical assistance to campus directors and classroom staff based on Fall 2022 data. Additionally, CLASS data is also utilized to strengthen individual classrooms by providing instructional coaching using the Practice-Based Coaching Model (PBC). Teachers in need of

support are selected and prioritized based on CLASS scores and are assigned to an instructional coach to develop an action plan and begin the coaching cycle.

HCHSP identifies training and professional development needs in education by analyzing children's progress through CIRCLE Progress Monitoring, by looking at teachers' performance through the CLASS lens during the four cycles of CLASS observations conducted in a year, and through daily informal classroom observations/walkthroughs from Campus Directors and Administrators. In addition, the use of curriculum and resources such as Frog Street, Scope and Sequence, Haggerty Phonological Awareness, Dual Language Program, Lesson Plans, Daily Schedules, Assessment tool etc. is evaluated and adjusted as needed on a yearly basis.

HCHSP is currently using program data to determine systemic needs. The Education Department is taking the approach of the Gradual Release Model (I DO, We Do, You Do) to properly equip and build capacity in our current Campus Directors. We have developed a several documents for Campus Directors to further develop their knowledge on data analysis and quality interactions in the classrooms. Resources such as CIRCLE Progress Monitoring, Ignite by Hatch, and CLASS data as well as training sessions and other online resources from the NCQTL platform will be used to support Campus Directors transition from managers to instructional leaders.

**How does the Program identify strengths and needs for all educational staff, and select participants for coaching?**

The primary source that is used to determine the strengths and needs of the teaching staff is CLASS. CLASS is administered twice a year to all the adults in each classroom. The data is analyzed after each administration to determine the area's strength and areas for support. The data for the teachers are analyzed and determine the priority list for teaching and learning support. The

results of the Fall 2023 indicates that 24 teachers need and will receive intensive coaching from an expert coach (Education Coordinators), 22 will receive intensive coaching from a partnership coach, and 8 will receive support from the campus directors. The Coaching application in GoEngage platform will be used by the program coaches to document the support that they are providing to the coachee. The external partnership coaches utilize a specific application and platform in CLI Engage. The 24 teachers that are selected to receive intensive coaching have 2 or 3 domains in the re-completion designation. The CLASS scores are below the competitive threshold of below 5 in Emotional Support and Classroom Organization and below 2.3 in Instructional Support. The Education Staff and campus directors desegregate CLASS data. Walk-throughs conducted by the campus directors are more intentional using the campus and teacher's data. The campus data is used to provide professional development using the 15-minute in-service suites tailored to the campus' needs. The classroom data is used to individualize support for each teacher. Currently the campus directors are participating in the Practice-Based Coaching training from our Regional 6 Early Childhood specialist. All the campus directors will use strategies to support the teachers and improve teaching and learning. The results of the Spring 2024 data will be used to drive professional development. The program will conduct a comparative analysis and determine the growth for the program, campus, and classroom staff.

**Does the Program use a research-based coaching strategy for identified staff? Explain.**

***Practice-Based Coaching (PBC)***

HCHSP implements a researched-based coordinated coaching strategy for all classroom staff to assist in enhancing their teaching skills for effective practices. The Education Department developed a Coaching Plan which consists of implementing the Practice-Based Coaching Program as recommended by the Office of Head Start.

PBC will be delivered through the Education Coordinators and Campus Directors. The Education Coordinators meet the qualifications of expert coaches, as required by Head Start Performance Standard 1302.92 (c). Experts coaches provide intensive coaching to teachers prioritized based on CLASS data. The Education Department staff has currently identified twenty-four (24) priority 1 and 2 teachers that will receive intensive coaching and support using the Head Start PBC program based on their individual needs. Eight Priority 3 teachers will receive support from the campus director via walk-throughs and monthly professional development using the 15-minute In-Service Suites. Twenty-two (22) teachers will receive intensive partnership coaching through Texas School Ready.

**Identify areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards in your department.**

*Summary of strengths*

- Successful partnerships with 9 local ISDs
- Research-based curriculum: Frog Street, Pre-K On My Way, and Three Cheers
- Alignment of curriculum and resources with HSELOF and Texas Pre-K Guidelines
- Research-based CIRCLE-PM and Frog Street AIM assessment instruments to measure children's progress.
- CLI Engage and FS AIM platform that offers immediate reports for data analysis and grouping tools for individualization purposes based on assessment scores.
- Tablets with Ignite by Hatch to support individualization and teaching and learning.
- Center staff are provided with professional development to strengthen their understanding of proper implementation of curriculum and resources.
- Total of 26 CLASS reliable campus directors

- Total of 2 CLASS Trainers certified by Teachstone
- Evidence of quality teacher-child interactions
- Child led activities and interactions that promote independence.
- Participation of children in the Dual Language Model
- Disaggregation of data by Education Department staff to make informed decisions.
- On-going Practice-Based Coaching Program
- Continuation of Texas School Ready (TSR) in certain areas of the Program
- On-going department meetings for data analysis, planning and decision making.
- Documented Campus Support Visits by the Education Area Directors
- Monitoring systems like GoEngage, Hatch Ignite, CLASS, PBC, Lesson Plans, Attendance, 45-day deadlines for Child Development Assessment, Parent-Teacher Conference, Home Visits, etc.
- Processes for documentation and building leadership capacity.
- Home-School Connection packet for Families.
- CLASS Data to determine priority list of all teachers to provide support.
- Inventories to purchase instructional materials and furniture for all classrooms.
- The School Readiness Partnerships with the school district are working well. The School Readiness MOUs with nine (9) school districts where ISD certified personnel co-teach with Head Start teachers in all classrooms. Twenty-two (22) 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 can 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.

- Participation of children in the 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 can identify when to use Language of Instruction (LOI) and Language of the Day (LOD)
- On-going Practice-Based Coaching Program with three expert coaches
- Research-based CIRCLE-PM assessment instrument to measure children's progress using Average and Benchmark reports.
- The use of 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 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 throughout the campuses.
- Dialogues between and amongst departments to share children's progress.
- 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 their child's progress.

- Data Sharing between Education Area Directors and Campus Directors
- Use of the Gradual Release Model for trainings

### **What are the Critical Areas of concern your team has identified?**

After intentional reflection and examination of the different challenges the Education Department has faced in the past year, the following are areas for potential growth and improvement:

- Build leadership capacity for the campus directors.
- 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
- Use CIRCLE Progress Monitoring group reports and CIRCLE Activity Collection and Frog Street AIM platform to plan for teaching and learning and individualization.
- Upgrade internet services to improve performance of connectivity at the campuses.
- Refine the use of Learning Center/Individualization using the Progress Monitoring and CLASS data.
- Develop every piece of the daily schedule, align, and train the leaders of each campus to be intentional with the daily walk-throughs.
- The education department staff empowers the campus directors to monitor Learning Centers/Individualization to ensure that it's implemented with fidelity.
- Training for The Learning Centers/Individualization Plan will be provided to all campus directors to train all their teaching staff.
- Use the CLASS Data to support and coach all teachers.
- Create an area in GoEngage to Monitor the following:

- Professional Development for all teachers
- Campus Walk-throughs
- Campus Support Visits
- Expand the PBC app to include more CLASS data.
- Number of children with special needs placed in the same classroom.
- Severe challenging behaviors

**What strategies has your team identified 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 will generate data reports to make informed decisions to meet the program, campus and classroom needs.
- Campus Directors will submit walk-through forms and Training and Technical Assistance Form on any activities at the campuses. The Education Area Director will monitor the submission of documents.
- Education Area Directors and Campus Directors are conducting more intentional walk-throughs.
- Education Area Directors will monitor and support all 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 data 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 in 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 department is dissecting the 2022 Texas Pre-K Guidelines to train Campus Directors and teaching staff to become knowledgeable in the children's outcomes. Our department is also 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 high-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 department will continue working with the School Districts to provide training and support to strengthen School Readiness Partnerships. The Teaching Together Model is enhancing and refining the School Readiness Partnerships with the school districts to ensure all children are ready for kindergarten.

### **CHILD NUTRITION**

#### **Describe how nutritional services are provided to children and families in this program.**

- Nutrition services are provided in a family-style manner to the extent possible. Currently, children's participation has increased since the end of Covid 19 restrictions have been lifted.

- Head Start teachers do an excellent job of keeping our children engaged during mealtimes. It is wonderful to see that campus staff are also encouraging our children to participate and learn about nutrition all at the same time.

**How do you ensure that the meals served to children meet all USDA regulations?**

- To meet all USDA regulations on the menu, the staff utilize the food buying guide as a point of reference along with all updated policy guidelines set forth by USDA.
- In addition, Menu Surveys are sent out to each center to help evaluate overall meal acceptance, and future modifications are made to ensure that not only is the food palatable but age-appropriate and safe for consumption.
- Furthermore, the staff utilize internally trained staff and community partners such as the W.I.C. Program, UT-RGV, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension services.
- The staff also incorporate assistance from some of our Policy Council Board members to help review the overall menu.

**How do you accommodate the special dietary needs of individual children?**

- Campus staff conducts a nutritional assessment for every child that is enrolled.
- If the nutritional assessment concludes that special dietary needs are required, a Medical Statement for Special Dietary Needs form is given to the parent to be completed by his or her doctor.
- Once the form is completed and returned to the campus directors, they are sent to the Child Nutrition department for review.
- Trained personnel will then modify the menu based on the doctor's orders and reach out to the child's parents for clarity as needed.

- The newly formulated special diet menu is then signed, dated, e-mailed, and faxed to the central kitchen and the campus where the child is enrolled.
- The central kitchen staff will then purchase all the necessary items listed on the menu with the assistance of our department coordinators to ensure the right menu items are purchased.
- The updated menu items are labeled and sent to the campus where the child resides for consumption.

**Describe how health and nutrition education is provided to children. How are these services integrated into child development experiences?**

- Nutrition education is exemplified daily during mealtimes as teachers participate in the role modeling of meal consumption to our children and they teach them what each food item is and how it helps them grow.
- A monthly nutrition lesson plan is conducted where children get to individually participate in the creation of their snacks.
- During National Nutrition Month, children get to participate in nutrition-based activities. Also, nutrition-based school supplies are provided to remind them and the parents of healthy eating habits.
- The menu also provides a variety of different menu items that familiarize them to new foods and promote healthy lifestyles.
- Children learn best by participating in family-style meal services.

**How do you share information with families that promote nutrition, health, and safety at home?**

- Parents are provided nutritional information through various avenues.

- Quarterly newsletters with important nutritional information are sent out to parents.
- A parent corner is established at each campus where parents can obtain various forms of nutritional information including our Head Start Program menu.
- Parents are encouraged to participate in The National Nutrition Month activities.
- Community partners provide in-person community nutritional classes to the parents free of charge on an as-needed basis.
- Families are referred to local based agencies such as the Women Infants and Children's (WIC) Program and neighboring family physicians.
- Health and safety protocols are shared with parents via our Head Start Health Services department.

**Areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards:**

- The Program's menu continues to be a strength.
- Budget continues to improve as reimbursements are now done on a timely basis.
- Electronic Meal Claims are easier to complete.
- Timely meal delivery
- Accommodating and implementing an excessive number of special diets for the program.
- Proper distribution of meal services.
- Excellent multitasking and flexibility of Kitchen Staff during staff shortages and emergency situations.
- The majority of old food service equipment (refrigeration) has been replaced with new equipment.

**Critical Areas of concern:**

- Employee shortages at the campus, kitchen, and department level limit the execution of the overall program goals.
- The amount of time for campus-level food handling training needs to be increased.
- Time and temperature controls need to improve.
- Flexibility and ability to forecast meals for all campuses due to unexpected fluctuations in attendance.

**Strategies implemented to address Concerns:**

- Fill vacancies at the campus/kitchen level as soon as possible.
- Additional training for all employees.
- New equipment will continue to be purchased to meet the needs of the program.
- Reinforce that all time and temperature controls are obtained 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 Program has replaced most of the old equipment with new equipment.
- Staff have implemented site-level Electronic Meal Claiming for all Campuses.
- Staff are re-training each campus staff based on the findings.

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

- Establish policies and procedures for additional campus level guidance.
- Improve food handling practices through new and innovative approaches.
- Data-driven technology will assist in obtaining information faster and in a more effective way.

**SPECIAL SERVICES (DISABILITIES)**

**What efforts are taken to recruit children with disabilities (including children with severe disabilities)?**

HCHSP staff works collaboratively with Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Programs to contact parents for possible transition to Head Start. Door to door recruitment, community outreach, along with flyers and social media efforts help recruit children with special needs. If parents' express concerns during application intake, the HCHSP staff will provide the parent with their district's Child Find contact information and encourage parent to contact ISD Special Education Department to begin referral process. Follow-up will be done with parent once child enrolls with HCHSP. Continue collaborating with LEAs to advance referral and evaluation process on children with concerns identified from screenings. The Disability Department staff work collaboratively with HCHSP campus staff and ISD Special Education Department staff to ensure required documentation is in place. Also, ensuring services for children with disabilities are coordinated.

**Is there a system in place to track the provision of disabilities services? Describe the follow-up that occurs.**

Disability Department data is entered onto the GoEngage system. Reports are generated to monitor and track the provision of disability services. Reports are generated as needed as ongoing monitoring. These reports include all pertinent information regarding referral process and status of required Special Education paperwork such as ARD/IEP information. The Program Outcomes Portal (POP) is used to closely monitor the 10% of funded enrollment of children eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Disability Staff closely monitor the status of IEPs (Individualized Education Plan) that are expiring soon or have expired. Progress reports from LEA Special Education staff providing the services to the child are given to

parents. This report gives an indication of how the child is progressing in relation to the goals and objectives listed on the IEP. The teacher will document IEP objective on weekly lesson plan and reinforce it throughout the day. When a child is in the process of Special Education referral or there is a suspected disability, staff may recommend the parent to take child to primary doctor to determine if the child can be evaluated by a private rehabilitation agency. Head Start staff will document case notes on GoEngage which includes information regarding the child such as progress notes, IEP meeting notes, staffing, any observation on the child, etc.

**How are children with disabilities included in ongoing assessment? Are all children included? Give examples of how appropriate accommodation was made for their special needs.**

Screenings and assessments are completed within the first 45 days of enrollment regardless of disability. Progressive follow-up regarding children with an active IEP is completed. The services provided are coordinated with Head Start staff and Special Education service providers. All children follow the curriculum for the pertaining ISD. Children with an IEP will follow recommendations and/or accommodations established in their IEP. Through the MOU, LEA children with significant disabilities from the ECSE classroom of the LEA are allowed opportunity to dual enroll with Head Start and participate in an inclusive educational setting. The MOU allows for a Special Education Teacher to provide instruction in the Head Start classroom and implement the IEP. Special Education Staff provide related services at Head Start designated campus. Head Start staff accompany children to sessions provided by Special Education professionals, if necessary. Head Start staff also provide support and modifications to children who do not have an IEP but need individualized services based on their needs.

**What types of modifications has the program made to meet the specific needs of children with disabilities over the past year?**

Individualized modifications and instructional support are used to ensure participation of children with disabilities. Curriculum modifications are given by the Disability Department to implement individualization pertaining to the progress of goals from the child's IEP. A Disability Aide/Floater is assigned to every two classrooms to provide support with instruction, guidance, redirection and implementation of accommodations or recommendations. Adequate special utensils, materials, equipment, and anything else needed to meet a child's specific needs are provided. Diapering supplies are provided to children with special needs. HCHSP assured facility accessibility for any individual with a disability.

**How does the program provide parents with information and assistance in understanding and advocating for services and support needed to address their child's special needs?**

HCHSP continues to work with parents by enhancing their knowledge of the rights under IDEA to be better advocate for their children. Parents are informed on various organizations whose purpose is working with families who have children with disabilities. The Disability Department provides information to the campus staff to communicate with parents on upcoming conferences, fairs and events pertaining to the disability of their child, communicating on benefits of attending. HCHSP provides every parent with a Community Resource Directory which links parents to local resources. HCHSP informs parents of special education referral process and services provided by LEA and/or private entities for services with early intervention. The Program continues to partner with the Special Education Departments in promoting awareness and education for students with disabilities.

**Provide us with some examples of the information, support, and guidance available to provide services to children with disabilities and their families.**

The Disability Department staff distribute informational brochures to parents during HCHSP Parent Fair and attend Parent Committee meetings to provide information on IDEA/Section 504, ECI, Transition and Special Education referral process. There is continuous communication with parents on special education referral process, purpose of evaluation, and ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) determination. Parents are encouraged to attend ARD/IEP meetings, advocating for the best interest of the child. Upon parent's request, Head Start staff attends ARD meetings in case parent has any questions. A disability support group list is sent to campuses to be provided to parents. Extended support to families using the Family Partnership Agreement (FPA) will be used to help them identify family strengths and needs. This will include needs relating to siblings' needs relating to disabilities. Staff will refer families to appropriate community resources to assist them in receiving services and securing equipment/devices to assist the child as needed.

**Identify areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards in your department.**

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 as well as children with medically diagnosed disabilities. The 10% funded enrollment of children with disabilities has been exceeded for this program year and continues to exceed with referrals pending for evaluation. Head Start staff continues to work collaboratively through the Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the collaborative LEA Special Education Departments to establish cooperative working relationships while ensuring that the appropriate services are provided to the children. The Disability department coordinates training for staff with

the LEA Special Education Department on the referral process. Head Start staff continues to work with Special Education staff providing services to the children, such as In Class Support, Occupational, Physical, Speech Therapy and Itinerant Services. The Special Education staff provide 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 the least restrictive environment for total inclusion. The Program assigns Disability Aid/Floaters one to every two classrooms to assist the teacher with all the children, this allows for the children to develop alongside non-disabled peers. Head Start staff continue to work with parents and staff by enhancing their knowledge of the rights under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) to be better advocates for their children. Training for staff is provided as needed, as well as providing exposure to various organizations whose purpose is working with families who have 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.

**What are Critical Areas of concern your team has identified?**

Children with disabilities that are experiencing challenging behavior is prevalent. Professional Development along with the mental health process for challenging behavior should start early to ensure appropriate interventions are followed.

**What strategies has your team identified to address concerns:**

A collaborative effort is established between the Program and other agencies and organizations serving children with disabilities to identify and to facilitate a continuity of services necessary to meet the child's developmental needs. Promoting content area coordination to ensure the delivery

of comprehensive program services for every child with a disability and their families. With parent's consent, if there is a suspicion or diagnosis of a disability, staff will refer children out to LEA Special Education Department for formal evaluation. Ongoing monitoring and support will continue 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. Continue to provide professional development in disability/behavior.

**Where are we now?**

Staff continue to recruit children with disabilities. Parents are elated that their children with disabilities are in an inclusive environment. Training and Technical Assistance is given to staff as needed to establish a more systematic structure. Data is entered on GoEngage, allowing the Disability Department to coordinate services and training where necessary, allowing accuracy in PIR (Program Information Report) in 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 Head Start continuing their services. This will ensure that the appropriate services are rendered. The Disability Department plans to provide staff with effective training on documentation required for child's file through GoEngage. Our goal is to ensure we are providing real-time assistance with professional development within the Disability content area. Proper training of the implementation of GoEngage with the Disability Department will ensure that there is accuracy on monitoring and reporting. Provide more professional development training to classroom staff in the Disability area. The all-inclusive

playgrounds enable children of all abilities to develop physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

### **Transportation/Field Operations**

**How do you make sure that the program's facilities, materials, equipment, and transportation services are appropriate for the children you serve?**

- Limited transportation services are provided to children. A safety vest/harness is provided for each child being transported. A bus monitor is always on board with the children.

**How do you make sure that the program's facilities, materials, equipment, and transportation services are appropriate for children with disabilities?**

- All campuses are required to meet minimum licensing standards.
- Playground equipment is age appropriate; all equipment is anchored and meets minimum standards requirements.

**When choosing a facility, what things do you consider?**

- Classroom space meets minimum standard requirements.
- Availability of toilets, urinals, and lavatories
- Playground space, kitchen space, condition of facility

**How do you ensure that required inspections, maintenance and repairs are taking place and the facility follows all other relevant Federal, state, tribal and local requirements?**

- A campus is assigned to each team member to conduct ongoing monitoring and identify the areas of need.

**How do you ensure that the facilities, materials, and equipment are accessible and useful to persons with disabilities?**

- Campuses are equipped with ramps.
- Campuses are equipped with necessary grab bars in ADA bathroom facilities.
- Restrooms have the necessary space for a wheelchair radius.

**How do you ensure that facilities are free of toxins such as smoke, lead, pesticides, and herbicides?**

- Pest control company is utilized for pesticides and other services.
- Chemicals used are approved for use around children and staff.
- Bottled water is purchased for children and staff

**For children who are transported to the program, how is the time spent riding the bus used to reinforce the curriculum and otherwise foster healthy child development?**

- Bus monitors sing along with children, recite the colors, ABC's, numbers, and engage in conversation.

**How does the program ensure that all parents and children are trained in pedestrian safety and bus safety practices?**

- Training is conducted at the beginning of the year for parents and children on bus safety. It is part of the parent handbook.

**Identify areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards in your department.**

- Collaboration with school districts
- School Districts provide transportation for Head Start children that are zoned within the campus area.

- Facilities are properly maintained.

**What are Critical Areas of concern your team has identified?**

- Shortage of bus drivers.
- Need for new buses.
- Need a bob cat to work and move mulch, dirt, etc. when needed.
- Need basic tools for each bus driver to carry with them (screwdrivers, pliers, etc.)

**What strategies has your team identified to address concerns:**

**Where are we now?**

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

- The possibility of hiring drivers with non CDL, and consider purchasing vans where a CDL is not required to transport children.

**ERSEA/Family Services/Community Partnerships**

**How does the Program identify children and families with the greatest need?**

At intake, families in greatest need are identified utilizing the Poverty Income Guidelines and Priority Guidelines for enrollment. Information obtained from the Community Needs Assessment and Program Assessment is used to determine what areas or campuses are most in need or require additional services.

**How does the Program develop and maintain selection criteria based on data from the community needs assessment?**

The Office of Head Start provides us with the most recent poverty income guidelines each year. The Policy Council reviews and approves Poverty Income Guidelines and the Priority Guidelines for Enrollment on an annual basis. A family must meet eligibility criteria to qualify for Head Start

services. Target recruitment areas are identified through the information collected from the Community Needs Assessment. Target areas are those populated with families that identify as those with the most need.

**How does the Program monitor and track eligibility of each participant in alignment with regulations, including age?**

All applications are completed and processed using the GoEngage software system. The program utilizes GoEngage to secure, monitor, and store all documents. GoEngage is a self-monitoring system used to generate reports. Documents verifying SNAP, TANF, or SSI eligibility are requested for those families that are categorically eligible. Income documents, such as the current Income Tax Return is obtained to verify a family's income when no other eligibility source applies. The GoEngage system generates a priority ranking for each application based on a child's age, family status and eligibility criteria.

**How does the Program retain eligibility documentation in alignment with regulations including age?** The GoEngage software system is a secure data platform that safeguards parent information. Applications are reviewed and verified using three levels of verification to secure the most accurate information. Family Service Workers (FSW) review and secure documents and complete the intake process. Campus Directors review and verify that the application is complete. Family Services Coordinators review, verify documents, and determine eligibility for enrollment. To qualify for Head Start, a child must be three years old on or before September 1<sup>st</sup> and qualify categorically or by not exceeding the income guidelines. Acceptable documents obtained to verify age are a birth certificate, baptismal certificate, or hospital birth facts. Documents verifying SNAP, TANF, or SSI eligibility are requested for those families that are categorically eligible. Income documents, such as the current Income Tax Return are obtained to verify a family's income when

no other eligibility source applies. The GoEngage system generates a priority ranking for each application based on family status and eligibility criteria.

**How does the Program train and monitor staff on the eligibility determination process?** Staff training is provided annually, and additional training is provided as needed in small group settings or individually. Professional development opportunities continue throughout the year. The Family Services Coordinators are available to provide guidance on the Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) process and the GoEngage software system daily.

**How does the Program identify, track and fill program vacancies?**

Enrollment is tracked daily utilizing reports generated from the GoEngage system that identify any under-enrolled campuses. Vacancies are filled by referring to the campus waitlist. Enrollment is based on priority.

**Does the Program maintain at least 10% of funded enrollment with children eligible for services under the individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)? What is the current enrollment?**

The program reserves 10% of its funded enrollment for children eligible under the IDEA act. The Hidalgo County Head Start Program currently has a program enrollment of 3200 children. The current enrollment for children under the IDEA act is 359, currently exceeding 10%.

**What methods does the Program use for two-way communication with families?**

A variety of methods of communication are utilized to ensure families are being kept in the loop and aware of student progress, campus activities, and general campus information. Communications take place by telephone, class dojo, home visits, social media platforms, take-

home notices, and email. Communication between the FSWs and families is continuous throughout the Family Partnership Agreement (FPA) follow-up process.

**Does the Program communicate in the language spoken by families?**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program is respectful of each individual families' primary language. Translation services are offered as needed.

**Explain how the Program aligns intake and assessment procedures with the Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework.**

The initial connection with families begins at intake and continues throughout the application process. Developing positive relationships with families is critical and an emphasis of the program. FSWs and campus staff communicate continuously with the families throughout the program year. Assisting families to become self-reliant is a collaborative effort.

**How does the Program collaborate with families to create goals based on family interests and needs?**

Part 1 of the Family Partnership Agreement (FPA) is initiated within 45 days after enrollment by FSWs. Goal setting takes place at Part 2 of the FPA process; 45 days thereafter. FSWs assist families in identifying their strengths and needs to develop their goal. Goals are family-led and developed by the family. FSWs provide guidance on how to achieve family goals or by utilizing the referral process.

**How does the Program conduct ongoing review on the progress in supporting family goals?**

Progress is tracked every 45 days or as needed depending on family status or situation. The referral process is available as needed.

**How does the Program provide families opportunities to improve parenting knowledge and skills?**

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors is a research-based parenting curriculum that consists of 10 sessions offered to Head Start parents. Topics of interest include financial literacy, child development, health, and advocacy. Parents are encouraged to attend parent meetings, conferences, and other parent events throughout the year.

**How does the Program engage fathers and other male caregivers?**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program promotes father engagement because of the positive impact their participation will have on their child's development. Fathers are encouraged to participate in the application process, home visits, conferences, and other campus events such as Campus Committee Meetings, and Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors sessions throughout the year.

**How does the Program develop community partnerships that facilitate access to resources that align with families' needs or family partnerships goals?**

Parents are provided with opportunities to meet, discuss, and obtain information on community services through:

- Network Meetings
- Parent Fair
- Conferences
- Community Resource Directory
- Parent Workshops
- Child Find Fairs (Children with disabilities)

**How does the Program collaborate with receiving schools to support smooth transition for children and families?**

The Program has a written MOU with nine (9) Local Education Agencies (LEA). Twenty-Two (22) of our campuses are located on elementary school campuses. This partnership allows the children to be dual enrolled and participate in the “Teaching Together” model.

**How does the Program incorporate strategies to support successful transitions to new learning environments?**

Certified ISD teachers work together with Head Start staff to share data, implement transition activities for kindergarten placement, the alignment of curriculum with activities and objectives that support a blended Head Start and Pre-k program approach, co-deliver educational services, and share the responsibility of lesson plans. As a team, the teachers work collaboratively to make instructional decisions and share the responsibility of student outcomes.

**Identify areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards in your department.**

- Campuses maintain an average ADA of 85% or greater.
- When a child does not arrive at school, the campus staff attempt to contact the parent to ensure the child’s well-being within one hour of program start time. Case notes are documented for each absence on the GoEngage system.
- ERSEA procedures are being followed. Eligibility determination records are obtained to verify age, income, and/or eligibility category for all applications. All procedures are automated using the GoEngage system. Application intake is available by accessing [www.hchsp.org](http://www.hchsp.org).

- All Campus Directors and Family Services Workers (FSWs) are trained on program policies and procedures that describe actions taken against staff, families, or participants who attempt to provide or intentionally provide false information.
- Family Partnership Agreements are being completed on a timely basis; FSW case note documentation is individualized per family.
- A research-based parenting curriculum “Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors” is offered to all Head Start parents. Sessions take place at each respective campus to help parents practice parenting skills to promote children’s learning and development.

**What are Critical Areas of concerns your team has identified?**

The Program is currently under enrolled and is participating in the Office of Head Start Full Enrollment Initiative (FEI). Funded enrollment for the 2023-2024 program year is 3200. Current enrollment is 3098.

**What strategies has your team identified to address concerns?**

- **Where are we now?**

Recruitment efforts continue daily. Staff is recruiting door to door, canvassing area neighborhoods. Staff attend area community fairs and distribute program information flyers. The Program is in collaboration with nine local ISDs and partners with Early Head Start (EHS), Region One, and Easter Seals. Social Media platforms, PSAs, and electronic billboards are being utilized as additional methods to promote the program and increase enrollment.

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

The application process for PY 2024-2025 has been initiated. Campus staff have started the recruitment process for next year and are working to acquire full enrollment by May 2024.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

### **How does the Program monitor and maintain appropriate qualifications for staff?**

The Program ensures that staff qualifications and competency requirements meet the requirements of the Office of Head Start Performance Standards 1302.91. The Program must ensure all staff, consultants, and contractors engaged in the delivery of program services have sufficient knowledge, training and experience, and competencies to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of their positions and to ensure high-quality service delivery in accordance with the Program performance standards.

The Program ensures that job descriptions reflect the appropriate staff qualifications and that positions are advertised appropriately. During the applicant screening process, the program ensures that new hires meet the job requirements as well as set professional development goals to grow their skills in their roles. The Program monitors that staff have the appropriate qualifications by entering the data in the MIP Human Resources Module and well as scanning all verified documents. The Program generates reports to ensure that staff have the appropriate qualifications and remain current with the certifications required for their roles.

### **Has the Program completed all necessary background checks? How does the Program monitor?**

The Program ensures that background checks and selection procedures are followed in accordance with Head Start Program Performance Standards 1302.90. Before a person is hired, directly or through contract, including transportation staff and contractors, the Program ensures that an

interview is conducted, references are verified, and a sex offender registry check is conducted by obtaining a State or tribal criminal history records, including fingerprint checks; or, Federal Bureau of Investigation criminal history records, including fingerprint checks.

The Program reviews the information found in each employment application and completes the background check through the Texas Childcare Regulation Division to assess the relevancy of any issue uncovered which may include any arrest, pending criminal charge, or conviction to determine whether the prospective employee can be hired, or the current employee must be terminated. The Program ensures that newly hired employees, consultants, or contractors do not have unsupervised access to children until the complete background check process is complete.

The Program conducts complete background checks for each employee, consultant, or contractor at least once every five years to ensure the safety of children and staff. Both initial and renewed (eligible) background checks are entered into the MIP Human Resources Module and are constantly monitored to ensure that they are renewed in a timely manner. The Texas Childcare Regulation Division notifies the program when a background check is due for renewal. The Program only allows employees, consultants, or contractors who are found “eligible” to provide services to Head Start children enrolled in the program.

**Does the Program maintain qualified fiscal staffing? Explain.**

The Program ensures that staff qualifications and competency requirements meet the requirements of the Office of Head Start Performance Standards 1302.91. The Program assesses staffing needs in consideration of the fiscal complexity of the organization and applicable financial management requirements and secures the regularly scheduled or ongoing services of a fiscal officer with sufficient education and experience to meet their needs.

The Program has ensured that the Chief Financial Officer has, at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree in accounting, business, fiscal management, or a related field. The Assistant Chief Financial Officer obtains a baccalaureate degree in accounting. The Payroll Bookkeeper must have a certificate from a university or accredited Technical Institute in Payroll/Bookkeeping, or 2-5 years' experience in Payroll/Bookkeeping and/or related field. The Accounts Payable Bookkeeper is required to have a High School Diploma or its equivalent and must have 3 years' experience in accounts payable bookkeeping.

**Describe the performance appraisal process. How often does it occur?**

The Program's performance appraisal process is a review of an employee's job performance and overall contribution to the organization. During this process, employees have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and outcomes. Employees see a renewed sense of accountability for their performance. Employees are driven and motivated towards their individual goals. If additional support is needed to improve performance, the employee is provided with training from the pertaining department to ensure improvement.

When a new employee begins employment with the Program, the employee is placed on a six-month probationary period where the performance appraisal is conducted and reviewed with the employee monthly. The employee completes a total of six (6) performance appraisals during this time. After the probationary period is complete, the employee performance appraisal process is only completed on an annual basis.

**Is the staff aware of the Program's policies regarding the reporting child maltreatment? Can you briefly describe the process?**

In accordance with Head Start Program Performance Standard 1302.90, the Program has established written personnel policies and procedures that are approved by the governing body and

policy council and are available to all staff. The Program's policies regarding the reporting of child maltreatment are introduced and distributed to all employees and contractors during new employee onboarding (pre-service) training and annually thereafter. The Program has established an annual review of the policies for the prevention, recognition, and reporting of child maltreatment. A person who has cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by child maltreatment by any person shall immediately make a report to the appropriate authority as required by law. The policy, procedure, and contact information for reporting is made available to all staff, consultants, and contractors at administration and at each individual campus. The Hidalgo County Head Start Program (HCHSP) places the utmost priority on child health and safety and is committed to continuous quality improvement and will continue to provide support and guidance in preventing incidents that jeopardize children's safety. Preventing significant incidents that affect children's health and safety in the Program is the responsibility of all staff, volunteers, and contractors. The Program is required to submit reports to the Office of Head Start (OHS) Program Specialist assigned to the Program, immediately or as soon as practicable, any "significant incidents" affecting the health and safety of children enrolled in Head Start. Immediately or as soon as practicable refers to without delay, but no later than seven (7) calendar days following the incident. Failure to report a significant incident within seven (7) calendar days from the time of the incident will result in the Program receiving a monitoring finding, which may include a deficiency determination.

**What is the Program's comprehensive approach to professional development?**

In accordance with Head Start Program Performance Standard 1302.92, the Program has established and implemented a systematic approach to staff training and professional development designed to assist staff in acquiring or increasing the knowledge and skills needed to provide high-

quality, comprehensive services within the scope of their job responsibilities, and attached to academic credit as appropriate.

Employees are required to set individual professional development goals to continue learning and develop in the workplace. Setting professional development goals helps give each employee a vision of what their career will look like in the next year, the next five years, or even the next ten years when it comes to their professional development within the organization.

The Program provides all new staff, consultants, and volunteers with an orientation that focuses on, at a minimum, the goals and underlying philosophy of the program and on the ways, they are implemented. In addition, the Program provides comprehensive professional development throughout the program year to ensure we meet the requirements of the Office of Head Start, the Texas Childcare Licensing Division, and the individual needs of the employees to ensure that they are provided with the necessary training to provide high-quality services to all stakeholders of the Head Start Program.

**Identify areas where the program is working well. Provide examples of program strengths or areas where the program exceeds Performance Standards in your department.**

The Human Resources Department continues to work well in utilizing the documents required by the Hidalgo County Head Start Program Policies and Procedures, Civil Service Commission Rules, and by the Texas Childcare 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, PIS 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 fifty (50) 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 record 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.

According to our records:

- 100% of all employees, volunteers, and ISD Teachers have a current Criminal Background Check as required by Head Start Program Performance Standards and the Texas Department of Health and Human Services Childcare Regulation Division.
- All ISD Teachers have been provided all required Pre-Service Trainings and/or attended the required Annual Training.
- All ISD Teachers are classified as caregivers and counted in the child staff ratio.
- 43.62 % of HCHSP active employees (219) are current or former Head Start parents.
- HCHSP is currently budgeted for 560 employees, of which 506 are full-time employees and 54 are education substitute teachers. In addition to this we have 21 budgeted positions under the Texas Department of Agriculture for the Nutrition Program. This brings a grand total amount of 581 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. The staff continue to utilize the COVID-19 Employee and Student Information Reporting Form. The Program 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.

**What are Critical Areas of concern your team has identified?**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program works in collaboration with the local independent school districts in the ISD/Head Start “Teaching Together” model to expand Head Start services to the Pre-K children enrolled. Due to the recent Change in Scope Model, one of the critical areas of concern for the program is finding fully certified bilingual teachers to meet the needs of the local independent school districts and the Texas Education Agency requirements. According to the Texas Education Agency, there is currently a teacher shortage for the 2023-2024 school year in Texas for Bilingual Teachers. The Texas Tribune has declared that Texas’ teacher shortage has affected school for years and was made worse during and after the coronavirus pandemic.

**What strategies has your team identified to address concerns:**

- **Where are we now?**

The Hidalgo County Head Start Program has made the commitment to financially support the current baccalaureate level teachers throughout the Alternative Certification Program. Currently,

our program has forty-five (45) candidates enrolled in the Alternative Certification Program and twenty-four (24) completers enrolled with their university. The Program supports all teachers as well as Campus Directors throughout the program to ensure that they excel towards full certification.

- **What is the Plan for the Future**

The Program will continue to form collaborations with the local independent school districts in the ISD “Teaching Together” model to expand our Head Start services to the Pre-K children enrolled. The plan is for the Program to find fully qualified staff to provide high quality services.

## CONCLUSION

The self-assessment report offers a comprehensive reflection on the Program’s performance, encapsulating the accomplishments, challenges faced, and the learning and growth that have occurred. This exercise not only showcases achievements but also sets the stage for identifying areas of improvement and strategizing future goals. By evaluating contributions and outcomes, this report serves as a pivotal tool in professional development, ensuring continuous progress and effectiveness.

Incorporating learnings from the self-assessment into the report enriches its value, transforming it from a mere account of what has been done to a powerful tool for future growth. These learnings can include insights on strengths and weaknesses, a better understanding of the work and how it fits within a team, and the identification of specific areas where further skill development is needed. Additionally, reflecting on feedback received, both positive and constructive, and analyzing how it has been actioned, can provide a clear path for ongoing improvement.