

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT



December
2021

Head Start Community Program of Morris County
Head Start/Early Head Start



COMMUNITY PROGRAM of MORRIS COUNTY

REFLECTIONS

Morris County is one of the most affluent counties in the United States, and the county performs very well on key benchmarks related to education, health, and social services. However, as described throughout the Community Assessment report, there is great diversity of need in Morris County. It is when reviewing local data, within Morris County, that diversity of need becomes most evident. By targeting services to areas with high rates of child poverty and serving low-income families, many of whom speak Spanish and are undocumented immigrants, Head Start Community Program of Morris County is providing services to the children and families most in need.

Drawing from the data and findings of Head Start Community Program of Morris County's 2021 Community Assessment, and observations from leadership team members, the following reflections capture key takeaways.

Reflection 1: Program Design. It is best practice for Head Start/Early Head Start programs to review their slot allocations, compared to community-wide trends. This is a process that Head Start Community Program of Morris County engages in regularly. Continuing this practice will allow the agency to continue to respond to changes in community needs, when they arise.

With regard to Head Start/Early Head Start staffing, Community Assessment survey data highlighted areas for further discovery and information sharing. Head Start Community Program of Morris County leadership team members also note the importance of completing an upcoming wage comparability study that will help to guide compensation within the agency, an important factor for maintaining a high-quality workforce to meet families' needs. Staying abreast of new federal funding opportunities to enhance staff compensation, a widespread challenge in the early care and education workforce, will allow Morris County to be responsive to opportunities for funding, if desired.

Reflection 2: Parent Training and Employment. Community Assessment data show rates of unemployment higher than the countywide rate in communities served by Head Start Community Program of Morris County, and PIR data echo these high rates among Head Start/Early Head Start families. In addition, survey data point to financial and employment concerns for low-income families. Head Start Community Program of Morris County may continue to leverage internal resources and collaboration with community partnerships to provide educational counseling, job training, and resources to families related to employment skill building and job search.

Reflection 3: Bilingual Support. Head Start Community Program of Morris County serves a majority of families who speak Spanish as their primary language, as well as a growing number of Arabic speakers. Program leadership team members reflect on the need for bilingual service providers in the county, and this data is confirmed in Community Assessment survey results. Language is an identified barrier to accessing services. Head Start Community Program of Morris County may seek to help expand families' awareness of and access to bilingual, culturally sensitive resource providers in the community, and collaborate with community agencies to address language barriers families may face when accessing resources and support. Head Start Community Program of Morris County's continued focus on providing bilingual services to Head Start/Early Head Start families is essential to meet enrolled children and families' needs.

Reflection 4: Affordable Housing and Homelessness. There is great disparity in housing costs and affordability in Morris County, as well as high rental cost burden in communities. A need for housing support and affordable housing was identified among the top needs in Community Assessment surveys. Advocating for and continuing to provide support to families experiencing homelessness and those on the brink of homelessness, particularly in the absence of eviction protections, will help to support families with housing challenges. Ensuring that families are aware of and understand the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and how it impacts eligibility for and services available from the Head Start/Early Head start program will also support enrollment of homeless children into the program.

Reflection 5: Transportation. Despite widely available public transportation services in Morris County, transportation was a barrier identified in Community Assessment survey data. Head Start Community Program of Morris County may continue to help expand families' awareness of available public transportation options. Continued collaboration with local and county partners and service providers may help to address hard to solve issues related to transportation needs for families in the service area.

Reflection 6: Impact of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has had extended impact on communities in Morris County. Regularly reviewing community data to adapt to the impact of COVID-19 on families will continue to benefit families served by Head Start Community Program of Morris County. Data such as unemployment, child welfare, food insecurity, substance abuse, and homelessness may be considered. Continuing to leverage partnerships and community resources will help Head Start Community Program of Morris County continue to support vulnerable families, including undocumented immigrants, those on the verge of homelessness, single parents, and grandparents (and other relatives) raising young children.