



## **2021 SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT & PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

### **I. Introduction**

#### **a. Program description**

Head Start Community Program of Morris County (HSCPMC) partners with families to provide comprehensive support for child development and school readiness, from prenatal to kindergarten ages, for the community's most vulnerable children. The vision of our program is to empower diverse families and strengthen communities. The program has a 56-year history of supporting at-risk children and families in Morris County, with its main site located in the heart of Dover. With the award of a second Head Start/Early Head Start grant in September 2019, which is now consolidated with our original grant, we provide free child development services for a total of total of 199 children through center-based Head Start programs, and 109 infants, toddlers and pregnant women through center-based and home-based Early Head Start programs, serving a total of 308 individuals. In addition to the Dover site, the program's 16-year collaboration with the County of Morris supports a new site with six state-of-the-art classrooms at the Central Avenue Complex (CAC) in Parsippany. Two classrooms at Duffy Elementary School in Wharton combine a Head Start and community program at this satellite location.

For the 2020-2021 school year, the program did not serve its full funded enrollment on-site due to COVID-19 restrictions and safeguards. However, a concerted effort by staff and administration worked to address the challenges of the pandemic with creative and practical solutions.

Locally designed and hybrid models were implemented in Dover Head Start classrooms, while Early Head Start classrooms operated for a slightly shortened, 6.5-hour day to accommodate staggered start and end times. At the Dover site, school district collaboration Head Start classrooms provided fully remote services through March, then pivoted to a hybrid model with lower class sizes which provided a combination of face-to-face and remote learning for 15 students per class, split into two cohorts. Non-collaboration Head Start classrooms followed this model for the full school year. At the



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CAC site, services were provided for four hours daily for Morris School District Head Start collaboration classes, and for 6 hours daily for the regular Head Start classroom. At the Duffy site, Head Start/community classroom services were gradually increased from a hybrid model to a five-day, 6-hour per day model, in cooperation with the school district. Through the year, some students continued to receive services in fully remote models at the request of their families. On numerous occasions during the school year, individual/multiple classrooms or sites pivoted to remote instruction due to COVID-19 outbreaks or required quarantines for COVID-19 exposures. However, families continued to receive services across content areas to support children's school readiness and family well-being.

### **b. Context and Methodology**

Despite the pandemic-responsive changes in program structure, HSCPMC continued to make progress on program goals and objectives. Data to assess progress was obtained from multiple sources, including ongoing monitoring, health and safety/facilities reports, child and family outcomes, management systems, staff and parent feedback, the prior year's Self-Assessment Report and Program Improvement Plan, and review of outcomes on grant application goals and objectives. Identified areas of focus were examined to address systemic issues and develop innovative approaches to improve quality. With a strength-based focus, the 2021 self-assessment provided a key framework for program management, planning and oversight.

We were able to conduct much of the self-assessment data gathering and examination process using technology, a process which has evolved since 2020, responsive to the pandemic. Staff and parent surveys provided key information. The leadership team, Board of Directors, and Policy Council (including Parent Committee) reviewed Ongoing Monitoring reports which shared data on Program Governance and Leadership; Management Systems; Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment & Attendance (ERSEA); Comprehensive Services; Fiscal Management; Environmental Health and Safety; and School Readiness Outcomes, along with PIR data. Data was also reviewed from external monitoring by the Office of Head Start in 2020 and 2021. Quantitative data in aggregate, along with



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qualitative data, were examined from multiple sources including professional development records; TSGOLD; Creative Curriculum Fidelity Tool; and CLASS/ITERS/ECERS observations. Inquiries were supported by reference to standards and documents including the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework; Head Start Program Performance Standards; NJ Birth-to-Three Early Learning Standards; and NJ Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, as well as the Goals and Objectives in the Head Start/Early Head Start Application.

The self-assessment timeline was spring 2021. During April and May 2021, the HSCPMC leadership team met to plan the self-assessment design, review training materials, and manage team assignments. Meetings (via Zoom platform) to review data with self-assessment participants took place on May 26, June 1, June 10, June 15, and June 22. The self-assessment team participating in these meetings was comprised of staff, parents and Policy Council members, members of the Board of Directors, and community representatives. Team members looked at data and conducted focused dialogues around strengths, solutions and ideas. Recommendations were compiled for development of this final report to guide planning for program improvement and share with stakeholders.

### **II. Key Insights: Successes and Opportunities for Improvement**

Key strengths of HSCPMC over the 2020-2021 program year included the development and implementation of a comprehensive pandemic response plan which enabled continuity of services to children and families. Throughout program sites and services models, the highest level of service allowable was provided. Staff reported feeling satisfied that the program was implementing health and safety measures to protect children, as well as adults working with the program. Thanks to CARES ACT funding provided through the Office of Head Start, substantial infrastructure, technology, and materials investments in the program will ensure responsive services far into the future.

In some areas, progress on grant goals and objectives has been slowed due to the challenges presented by the pandemic. Our School Readiness goals around strengthening systems to support children's school readiness in alignment with the HSELOF, NJ Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, and NJ Birth to Three Early Learning Standards have been most affected. While



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ECERS/ITERS assessments had to be paused due to the pandemic-related restrictions on classroom materials, our CLASS scores continued to improve. The CLASS instrument was administered in all classrooms by Reliable staff from the educational leadership team. CLASS Reliability for educational leadership was maintained, although we did not have access to ITERS/ECERS/TPOT/TPITOS Reliability training this year. The positive outcome of our coaching focus on the Instructional Support domain of CLASS was evident, with scores in this domain surpassing national averages. Pyramid Model implementation was also impacted by some groups of children's limited time in our centers. Inter-rater Reliability in Teaching Strategies GOLD was a standard achieved and maintained by all instructional staff.

Our goal to strengthen parent, family and community engagement processes and supports for family well-being and positive parent-child relationships was an area of progress. We achieved full implementation of the Positive Solutions for Families parenting curriculum, receiving strong positive feedback from parents. Also, program staff found myriad ways to stay connected with parents during the pandemic. Despite ongoing challenges to providing services in a community heavily impacted by COVID-19, HSCPMC was a source of support and resources for enrolled children, staff and community members throughout the pandemic. However, our community did not move forward with financial progress during 2020-2021, and indeed many of our families face an ongoing, arduous period of economic hardships due to the local economic impacts of the public health crisis.

In terms of our goal to establish best-practice program design and management systems to support staff professional development, attract and retain highly qualified staff, and ensure long-term fiscal stability, significant progress has occurred. As the agency has grown rapidly over the past several years, continuous improvement has been an area for increased focus.

The safety/security improvements during the program year have streamlined management of human resources functions and increased the efficiency of our facilities and equipment. Although the majority of these upgrades took place in response to the pandemic, the impact has been such that overall management systems are vastly improved. While staff professional development has been strengthened, systems for oversight and monitoring emerged as an area for growth. The self-



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assessment process has been integral in planning for improvement strategies, focused on recruiting and retaining highly-qualified staff. Some of our limitations in this area are budget related, and industry-wide staff shortages are endemic to the early care and education field at this time.

Significant progress was made on our facilities plan, with the successful opening of a new, state-of-the-art center at the Central Avenue Complex. Classroom improvements to increase opportunities for public pre-k collaborations were completed at the Dover site. Plans for expansion at the Dover site were stalled, with multiple submissions and returns of our facility major renovation application for OHS approval. As we have obtained OHS approval for consolidation of two grants, we have submitted another application for federal approval of the facility renovation which is tied to the single grant in its consolidated status.

**III. SUMMARY OF SELF-ASSESSMENT & PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Focus Area	Outcomes/Progress	Plans & Strategies for Improvement – 2021/2022 program year
COVID-responsive health and safety policies and procedures to support school readiness and comprehensive family services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Daily health screening with two/step verification for staff (Paychex app on staff phones and at site reception areas)</li> <li>● Outdoor/tent daily health screening process implemented for children, with staggered entry times for social distancing</li> <li>● PPE provided to staff and students</li> <li>● Laundry capacity increased and dedicated staff added</li> <li>● Custodial staff added to address health and sanitary environment</li> <li>● Physical space modifications through CARES act funding include plexiglass partitions, removal of carpet and installation of flooring, individual laptops and space divisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Update COVID-19 Standards Compliance Policy with measures consistent with changing guidance for 2021-2022 school year</li> <li>● Use Survey Monkey/Momentive to monitor changing family needs in real time</li> <li>● Review updates in guidance from OHS with policy language to plan for pivots to remote services during times of program or classroom closures in response to pandemic</li> <li>● Consider use of Survey Monkey/Momentive to</li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• VOIP WIFI powered phone systems enable remote access and communications with families</li><li>• Upgraded security systems and cameras installed to increase safety</li><li>• IT service provider upgrades and software included Google documents for remote access and sharing</li><li>• Technology supports (Creative Curriculum CLOUD, Zoom, iPads for school district collaborations, Dover) added to enable families to engage in school readiness activities at home</li><li>• Staff used a variety of methods to maintain family communication and connections: phone calls, virtual meetings, email correspondence, texts, socially distanced/threshold home visits</li><li>• Online applications facilitated through agency website</li><li>• Monthly delivery of Education packets and materials supported children's learning at home</li><li>• COVID-19 Standards Compliance Policy developed to guide responses in accordance with regulatory guidance</li><li>• Families had difficulty obtaining screening appointments with local healthcare providers</li><li>• Some families had challenges with consistent and reliable access to Internet</li><li>• The local community was very heavily impacted by COVID-19, with high incidence of virus positivity and severity</li><li>• Economic impacts to families were significant, with many losing jobs in service and hospitality industries</li><li>• Screening and assessments were challenging for fully virtual students</li></ul>	<p>connect with families to monitor children's attendance during pivots to remote services in response to pandemic</p>
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Focus Area	Outcomes/Progress	Plans & Strategies for Improvement – 2021/2022 program year
<p>Systemic Issue: Training and Professional Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bilingual trainings (English, Spanish) provided in most content areas</li> <li>● Training and Professional Development Policy was developed to guide and crosswalk training requirements across regulatory oversight agencies</li> <li>● Quality professional development provided through a variety of sources and platforms, including Grow NJ Kids, Teaching Strategies, in-house Zoom presentations, Google Docs, email links, and hybrid training models</li> <li>● Staff are brought in for a full week of training prior to start of school year</li> <li>● Professional Learning Communities take place via departmental Zoom trainings at regular intervals</li> <li>● Culturally and linguistically responsive trainings provided for Policy Council</li> <li>● Leadership team and Board of Directors participate in self-paced, online Governance training</li> <li>● System for ongoing monitoring of staff credentialing and professional development, including timeline for renewals of credentials needs improvement</li> <li>● Onboarding system needs improvement and better connections with area supervisors</li> <li>● Challenges are presented by dealing with three different school calendars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff supervisors to have direct responsibility for monitoring of their direct reports’ credentials and professional development, with support of Office Manager</li> <li>● Use Child Plus reports and NJCCIS reports to assist in tracking; possibly could be done through Paychex in future</li> <li>● Use Google Docs to keep Staff Credentials Matrix updated, allowing for input from multiple members of team</li> <li>● Update Staff Orientation Checklist and revise onboarding process to include multiple department briefings, with follow-up meetings after one month and three months</li> <li>● Staff to be individually responsible for updating their training documentation in NJCCIS</li> <li>● Celebrate staff professional development achievements through recognition and rewards such as attendance at Head Start Conference</li> <li>● Add reflective practice to training via a reflection</li> </ul>



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		<p>document or interactive feedback process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Seek to build a culture of excellence with staff buy-in to continuous improvement and pride in organizational achievements</li> </ul>
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Focus Area	Outcomes/Progress	Plans & Strategies for Improvement – 2021/2022 program year
<p>Systemic Issue: Staff Recruitment and Retention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Extensive systems implemented during pandemic to facilitate efficient, remote HR time and attendance systems (Paychex Flex)</li> <li>● Shortage of parking at Dover managed with automated parking system (FlowBird)</li> <li>● Staff childcare classroom provides 10 slots of free pre-k care for staff children (by seniority)</li> <li>● Staff wellness programs initiated include Mental Health and Wellness Program; weekly Zoom Yoga; virtual team building activities; staff appreciation events; Head Start Heroes Boards and recognition</li> <li>● Need to improve communication between departments</li> <li>● Approximately 15% of staff members resigned during current year</li> <li>● Most staff left for higher pay</li> <li>● Some staff left for COVID-related childcare issues</li> <li>● Education positions were especially difficult to fill</li> <li>● Staff overwhelmingly reported feeling satisfied with health safety measures taken to protect children and adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Administration to develop staff monthly newsletter to support morale and communication; recognize staff birthdays/work anniversaries/ special events and achievements</li> <li>● Establish monthly meetings between Family Services staff members and Education members who support the same families</li> <li>● Review suggestion for payout of unused sick/PTO time at end of Employment Year. Impact of this would be significant if a regular policy or communicated in advance.</li> <li>● Review suggestion for employer to pay 100% of employee healthcare premium</li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most staff feel respected, well-prepared for their jobs, and have good communication with their supervisor</li> <li>• Many staff feel underpaid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review salary structure and standardize ranges for positions</li> <li>• Look to grant consolidation to support more competitive staff wages</li> <li>• Innovative ideas for staff appreciation included sending snack boxes to their home during virtual training events/meetings; gift basket raffles; spa days; kindness notes to fellow workers; gift card raffles during trainings; luncheons and breakfasts for staff meetings and trainings; uniforms or smocks with center’s name and logo; games and fun activities as part of staff meetings</li> </ul>
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Focus Area	Outcomes/Progress	Plans & Strategies for Improvement – 2021/2022 program year
School Readiness Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Supervision Policy has been implemented with extensive training, to ensure the safety of children and staff</li> <li>• TSG data showed that children entered the program below or close to the bottom of Widely Held Expectations (WHE).</li> <li>• At midpoint, children tended to be in mid-range of WHE.</li> <li>• By end of school year, children were performing within WHE.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan a make-and-take math workshop to give education staff tools to support math learning</li> <li>• Plan training opportunities to connect literacy with math— feature books connected with math activities</li> <li>• Provide education staff with coaching support on math activities, extending children’s language and</li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All children showed significant growth, but children served in-person had higher outcomes than children served in virtual classrooms.</li> <li>● Areas of highest growth were social-emotional learning, literacy, cognitive and language</li> <li>● Areas in need of continued support are literacy and mathematics</li> <li>● Strong progress was made in the area of Instructional Support, detailed by CLASS data</li> <li>● Families were supported with technology to facilitate home instruction in response to pandemic (Creative Curriculum Cloud).</li> <li>● It was unknown whether families had a clear understanding of virtual learning expectations and assessing children’s progress</li> <li>● Student peer interaction was limited, along with opportunities for social-emotional growth</li> <li>● Families were supported with learning and supply packets, including monthly school readiness activity calendars, to help them with children’s learning at home.</li> <li>● Transitioning between virtual and in-person services proved challenging for some children</li> <li>● Challenges noted with managing children’s transition planning and services between programs, sites or classrooms</li> <li>● Additional gross motor space needed at Dover site</li> <li>● Ground surface improvement and stationary equipment needed at CAC playground</li> </ul>	<p>vocabulary, and drawing children’s attention to print and letter sounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Plan for leadership staff PD opportunities for Reliability when available (ECERS/ITERS/CLASS, TPOT, TPITOS, Family Development Credential)</li> <li>● Continue working toward full implementation of the TPOT and TPITOS instruments and the Creative Curriculum Fidelity Tool in classrooms.</li> <li>● Complete courtyard indoor/outdoor play and learning space at Dover</li> <li>● Seek funders to support installation of playground surfacing and equipment at CAC</li> <li>● If permissible, seek to add in-person Yoga program for pre-k students to assist in addressing mental health needs</li> <li>● Update process for Transition Plan via shareable Google document that ensures continuity of transition planning and services</li> <li>● Continue to seek federal approval of 1303 application for major renovation project to increase Dover facility classroom space</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● EHS Playground is dated and needs improvement</li> <li>● Some staff not well-versed in using Child Plus; we may not be using the system to capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue to seek space in community for offices, meetings, and Home-based socializations</li> <li>● Use EHS out of session time to improve and update playground</li> <li>● Seek Child Plus training for Education staff involved in inputting screening data and reports</li> </ul>
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Focus Area	Outcomes/Progress	Plans & Strategies for Improvement – 2021/2022 program year
Family Outcomes and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Families benefit from HSCPMC health programs to keep up-to-date with children’s immunizations, check-ups and health records</li> <li>● Mental health information and support provided through Home-based program with weekly contact was helpful to families</li> <li>● Staggered start times were helpful to families in managing transitions for children in multiple schools</li> <li>● Fatherhood Initiative has been a successful program for 6 years, with strong attendance and positive feedback, despite pivot to mostly virtual format during pandemic</li> <li>● Positive Solutions for Families has been very well received as parenting curriculum program. Attendance has been strong and parent feedback positive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To combat child obesity, explore ways to engage families in their children’s physical fitness activities. Provide families with more resources, ideas and direction to help families connect with local opportunities for children’s exercise and outdoor gross motor play. Provide families with information on resources and activities to support children’s physical activity or exercise inside the home, especially during winter months</li> <li>● Continue to focus on parent education about healthy eating, exercise, and lifestyles. Continue to work with community</li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 2,249 to-go meals were provided to children during pandemic (average 281 monthly)</li> <li>● Areas of strength included children’s continuous health care, up-to-date immunizations, and health insurance</li> <li>● Child obesity was a community issue, with approximate ¼ of enrolled children identified as overweight or obese</li> <li>● Summer subsidy program offered to pre-k students prioritizes social-emotional health and outdoor gross motor play</li> </ul>	<p>providers on supporting parent education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue to share information to facilitate community access to free or low-cost nutritional food sources (fresh fruit and produce)</li> <li>● Aftercare program, which has been paused due to Licensing COVID-19 restrictions is much needed by families. Resume program at earliest possible time.</li> <li>● Survey parents in beginning of school year to see what specific parent education topics will meet family needs, in addition to the required topics which are offered</li> </ul>
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**2021 Self-Assessment Team Members**

- Theresa Alonzo, Family Services Manager, HSCPMC
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- Yazmín Carvajal, Member, HSCPMC Policy Council; Parent
- Diana Choudhury, School Readiness Coordinator, HSCPMC
- Juan P. Fernandez, Facilities Manager, HSCPMC
- Gladys Garcia, Family Support Coordinator, HSCPMC
- Eileen Gibbons, Human Resources Manager, Center for Family Resources
- Robert C. Grant, President, HSCPMC Board of Directors
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