

HEAD START & EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

Dear Families, Colleagues, Friends, Community Leaders and Supporters,

I am very pleased to share our 2023-2024 Annual Report with you, and I hope you will enjoy reading about our work with the youngest children and families in Franklin, Hampshire and Western Hampden counties. From my perspective, here are some important highlights. First, the programmatic changes we implemented resulted in a smaller, but more vibrant, program. The significant staff salary increases allowed us to become almost completely staffed and fully enrolled. Our smaller classroom sizes and lower caseloads for Family Advocates have increased the quality of our work with children and families, and we were able to open an additional classroom for infants and toddlers at our Westfield site. Speaking of Westfield – in early September 2024, the Office of Head Start approved our \$10M application to purchase land and build a beautiful new Head Start site there, and construction will begin in the spring of 2025. This new 16,000 square foot center will be able to serve over 100 Western Hampden County infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families!

Speaking of families, we are grateful for our ever-deepening relationships with families and our wonderful parent leaders, for their roles on Policy Council as well as at Family Meetings. It has been a delight to work in partnership with our Policy Council Chair, Alena Bartoli, whose words are also included in this report. Finally, as always, all the good that happens at Head Start and Early Learning Programs happens because of our dedicated, passionate, hard-working, experienced and skilled staff. Thank you, thank you, thank you all, for doing the most important work of building relationships and supporting the young children and families in our communities.

***Humbly, and with gratitude, always,
Anat Weisenfreund, Director
Head Start & Early Learning Programs***

Dear Parents, Staff and Community,

I'm writing as we close the 2023-24 year, my second year as Policy Council Chair and my son's third year in the Head Start program.

After cuts to transportation funding for the last fiscal year, my son transferred from the Easthampton classroom to Head Start @ Home. Our home visitor worked hard over the past year to engage him as he grows. Deirdre has been a great source of support for me as I navigate solo parenting.

As my family gained greater stability, I was able to support Policy Council as a space for parent representatives to communicate site needs and to advise as we develop and maintain program policies. I'm proud to say that in addition to having parent reps from every site, we also met attendance requirements for every meeting. Acting on the initiative of our reps, we worked with administration to implement changes in selection criteria and parent-teacher communications and increased our Parent Activity

Fund budget by 50%. Our parents traveled all over the country from Washington, DC to New Orleans to Boston, advocating and learning on behalf of our program and families.

Writing at the beginning of my third term as PC chair, my goals for the 2024-25 year include:

- supporting our parent representatives to set goals for themselves and their sites,
- supporting the integration of responses to the climate crisis into our programming,
- and recruiting and preparing a leadership team for next year's Policy Council

We achieved a great deal during the past year, and I look forward to being present with you as we achieve together in the coming year.

***Warm regards,
Alena Bartoli
Policy Council Chair***



Anat Weisenfreund and Alena Bartoli



POLICY COUNCIL

Head Start Parent Members

- Alena Bartoli (Chair)
- Yashira Baez
- Deana Currie
- Natacha Flores
- Heather Frotten
- Caitlin Martin
- Mirasia McGahan
- Sierra Nester
- Jennifer Ribardi (Vice Chair)
- James Torrey, Sr.
- Melissa Winot

Community Members

- Cathi Erland-Flynn, MA
Department of Children and Families (Secretary/Treasurer)
- Nicole Lyman, Valuing Our Children
- Lewis Metaxas, Community Action Board Representative
- Sarah Patton, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant
- Robin Sudlow, REACH Early Intervention

The Head Start Policy Council partners in shared governance with the CAPV Board of Directors.

OUR HISTORY

Head Start has served our region for nearly sixty years, providing early education and care alongside a wide range of services for very low-income pregnant parents, infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families. Our service area spans nearly 1,600 square miles in the Pioneer Valley and includes three mostly rural and semi-rural counties from the border of Vermont to the border of Connecticut. In 2023-24 we operated eight center-based sites with locations and hours based on community needs, as well as our Head Start at Home home visiting program that spans our whole service area. Our work is rooted in the Brazelton Touchpoints Approach (TM) and deep relationships formed among staff and families.

OUR MISSION

We partner with families in all that we do and believe that parents are the experts on their children. Together, we build a solid foundation for resilient and resourceful caregivers; caring, confident, and curious children; and responsive, invested communities.

OUR PROGRAM GOALS

In 2023-2024 we launched a new five-year grant cycle with a set of goals that are rooted in our work so far. Our goals highlight our values and priorities as we aim, always, to enhance and strengthen our work. These goals are deeply related to our School Readiness Goals and all support children and families being ready for school and for life.



Access & Program Design: Based on community needs and workforce realities, we will design and implement a program structure that will ensure full enrollment and maximize quality.



Workforce: Because stable relationships with highly competent caregivers are essential to child development and to partnership with families, we will invest in strategies to increase wages, decrease turnover, and enhance the experience of working at HS & ELP.



Relationships: Because development occurs at the intersection of relationships between children, families, and program staff, we will deepen partnerships with parents and caregivers and enhance resources to help their children thrive.



Health & Safety: Because health is a foundation for school readiness, we will improve children's up to date health and dental status and support nutrition and physical well-being in our settings.



ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

Community Action Pioneer Valley learns about our region using data from the Census and other sources, surveys of participants and service providers, and the first-hand knowledge of community members including leaders on our Policy Council and Board of Directors. We use this information to make decisions about our program’s locations, hours, and services as well as which children and families are most in need of Head Start and Early Head Start. Our most recent Community Needs Assessment was completed in summer 2023 and updated in winter 2023. It found:

- There is only enough licensed child care and pre-K capacity in our region to serve about two-thirds of all young children, with particular challenges in rural areas
- Child poverty rates in our region rose from 2021 to 2022, particularly in Franklin County
- Rising costs of housing, utilities, and food have put additional burdens on families
- Homelessness among pre-K to 12 students in 2022-23 was striking in some communities, particularly Greenfield, West Springfield, and Orange, due in part to an influx of refugee families with children
- Transportation remains a major barrier to accessing services and can reinforce families’ isolation
- Children’s experiences during the past several years have had lasting impacts on their development

Even as we’ve faced these challenges, we have witnessed incredible resilience from our communities over the course of the pandemic years, and families have rallied together to help each other in difficult times.

Serving Our Community

Children and expectant parents are eligible for Early Head Start and Head Start services based on their age (birth to age 3 for EHS and 2 years 9 months to age 5 for HS) and their income (at or below the Federal Poverty Level, which was \$31,200 for a family of four in 2024). Children are also eligible if they are in foster care, they are homeless, or their families receive public assistance. We are able to enroll about one in twelve low-income children who are potentially eligible for Head Start, so we prioritize among applicants to serve the children and families most in need of support.

In 2023-2024, Community Action Pioneer Valley’s Head Start and Early Learning Programs (HS & ELP) provided services to 141 infants and toddlers and 5 pregnant women in Early Head Start from 133 families and 252 preschoolers in Head Start from 230 families.

As a result of labor shortages and hiring challenges that impacted the early childhood field since the COVID-19 pandemic began, HS & ELP began this school year on an Underenrollment Plan. Thanks to our Change in Scope and hard work across the program, we were on average 88% enrolled in Early Head Start and 87% enrolled in Head Start during the months when all program options were open—significant improvement and progress toward our 97% target!

OUR SERVICES

At Head Start & Early Learning Programs, our staff partner with each family to learn about their resources, needs, and goals. Specialists in family services, health, nutrition, mental health, and disabilities provide direct support and connections to community resources to help each family with what they want to achieve.

Mental Health

Our team of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (IECMHCs) partnered with families, educators, home visitors, and other program staff to support 115 children during the 2023-24 school year. They were also involved in updating our Case Management Guide to enhance and implement our system for supporting children, families, and classrooms. As one staff member reflected during Mental Health Awareness Month, "I think about all the ways children develop and the relationships they make early on in their lives, how important each interaction is to support a child's brain development. Seeing children building trusting relationships and learning how to self-regulate is foundational. Being part of the process here at HS & ELP and seeing how we support families and staff is meaningful work and a gift."

Disability Services

During the 2023-24 school year, 61 infants and toddlers (43%) and 67 preschoolers (27%) received support for a disability or developmental delay through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP). Since the COVID pandemic, we've experienced a higher rate of children in need of these supports. Our Disabilities Team, along with IECMHCs, worked closely with classrooms to increase the meaningful inclusion of children with diagnosed or suspected disabilities and developmental delays across all settings.

Family Services

Each family's experience at HS & ELP is built on a foundation of relationships, and one essential relationship is with their Home Visitor or Family Advocate! Through a dialogue about strengths, needs, and resources, the family gets support to set personal goals and access community resources. In 2023-2024, some of the most common goals families set included earning a GED or enrolling in higher education, supporting a child's transition to preschool or kindergarten, and engaging in fun learning activ-



ities with children at home and in the community. This year, 98% of Head Start and 95% of Early Head Start families received family services customized to their circumstances.

Health

Our health team works to support children's holistic health and well-being, but we have faced some prolonged challenges since the COVID pandemic. While 100% of children had medical homes and 97% of Head Start children and 77% of Early Head Start children had dental homes by the end of the year, there were barriers to staying fully up to date on the state's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) schedule. EPSDT requires a lengthy series of physicals, dental exams, vaccines, and screenings, with new events constantly coming due. By the end of the year, 20% of Early Head Start children and 31% of Head Start children were fully up to date. We have a focus on improving these numbers in our Program Goals, and new efforts will be put in place during the upcoming school year.

Nutrition

Our program set out this year to enhance our work providing locally-sourced, healthy food to all children. Over the course of the year we increased sourcing fruits, vegetables, and other foods from local farmers' markets; began making purees for our youngest children from fresh produce; and won a Massachusetts FRESH grant that provided resources and training to our nutrition staff! As in all areas, we partner closely with families—in nutrition we work to embed cultural diversity in menus and celebrate food that is meaningful to our children and families.

SCHOOL READINESS MISSION

Head Start & Early Learning Programs seek to build a foundation for lifelong learning. We work with families and the community so that children can develop caring relationships, confidence, and curiosity. Caring, confident, and curious children are ready for school.



School Readiness Goals

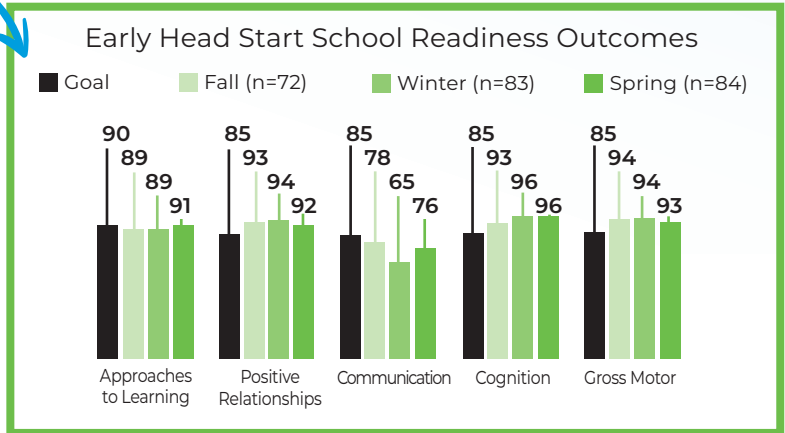
HS & ELP has School Readiness Goals about children's learning and development in these areas:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language/Communication
- Cognition (separated into Math and Science for preschoolers)
- Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
- Attendance

We integrate data on learning and development in these areas with our holistic knowledge of the children in our program and their needs. We study how children's attendance, primary languages, classroom features, disability status, and more relate to their progress over time. Classroom quality is measured with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and children's progress is tracked using the Teaching Strategies GOLD system.

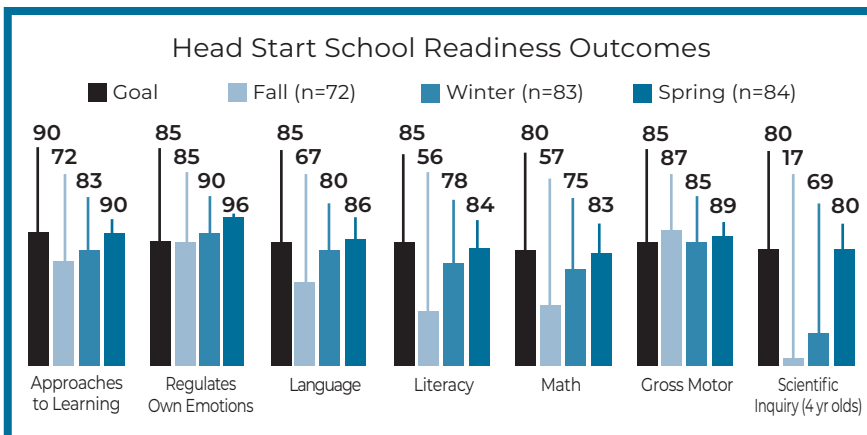
Early Head Start Outcomes

Infants and toddlers develop and change rapidly, so each child is measured against different expectations at different times through the year. The chart at right compares the proportion of children who were meeting or exceeding their age-appropriate expectations at each point in time in each domain of our School Readiness Goals. Children started the year strong, and we met or exceeded most of our goals! Regular reflection on our data helps to strategize for additional resources and approaches when needed.



Head Start Outcomes

In Head Start, each child is held to the same expectations throughout the year. While some children may leave during the year or new children enroll, numbers are more easily compared over time. Again, the graph shows our School Readiness Goals in comparison to children's progress at meeting and exceeding age-level expectations. Children made particularly noteworthy progress in the areas of Literacy, Math, and Scientific Inquiry. All School Readiness Goals were met or nearly met.



CONTINUITY OF CARE & RELATIONSHIPS

At HS & ELP, we know that all learning and development happens in the context of stable, caring, long-term relationships. Whenever possible, we work with families from pregnancy or infancy until their children go off to kindergarten! This spring we were delighted to celebrate several children who graduated after five years or more with HS & ELP. Here are two of their stories.



MATTHIAS

Before Matthias was even born, his mother was enrolled in Head Start at Home (then called Home-Based Early Head Start) for support during her pregnancy. He transitioned into the program when he was just over a month old, and his family continued to work with their Home Visitor until he transitioned to Vernon Street as a toddler.

His teachers this spring described Matthias as a social butterfly in the Butterfly Room! They say he is such a kind and caring friend to his peers and he gets along with everyone. Over his time here, Matthias has come out of his shell and developed the confidence to show the people around him



who he is. He has created strong, trusting bonds with his teachers, and he has also become much more independent. Matthias is a very kind person, who will always hold out his hand to a friend who has fallen, offer kind words to a friend who is sad, or invite a lonely friend to play with him.

Matthias's mother Francys said it was strange to think of not being a part of the Vernon Street community once he graduated! The wonderful staff have supported her through many difficulties. Starting a new chapter for her family is bittersweet, and she's so grateful to the teachers and the support staff at Head Start!

AVERYLL

Averyll first enrolled in Early Head Start when he was just over a year old! By the time he set off for kindergarten, Averyll was thriving in his academics. His teachers reported that he can spell his name, recognize and write most letters of the alphabet, and read and write simple words. He can count up to one hundred and do simple addition and subtraction problems. Averyll has grown significantly in his abilities to communicate his feelings with his words, regulate himself, and get along with his peers. Seeing his growth makes them especially proud to be his teachers be-



cause Averyll has worked through many challenges to get to this point. He has a great imagination, too – here he is holding onto pretend motorcycle handlebars in the sandbox!

When asked what the program has been like for her since her son's infancy, Averyll's mom Jade was very moved. She said that it's been just amazing. When she was devastated by a personal tragedy, staff stood near her in deeply meaningful and authentic ways. Jade will never forget how the program cared for her AND her son. They stood by her side every step of the way

HEAD START AND EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS OF COMMUNITY ACTION PIONEER VALLEY, INC.

STATEMENT OF REVENUE WITH BUDGET COMPARISON FOR HEAD START FOR THE YEAR ENDED SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

Revenue and support	Total HS & ELP Actual	Other HS&ELP Actual	Head Start & Early Head Start Actual	Total HS & ELP Budget
Head Start	\$6,656,186	\$-	\$6,656,186	\$6,666,099
Early Head Start	\$2,547,115	\$-	\$2,547,115	\$3,051,633
USDA Food and Nutrition Service thru DESE	\$270,347	\$270,347	\$-	\$-
Early Education and Care (EEC) Subsidies	\$2,315,291	\$2,315,291	\$-	\$-
EEC Head Start State Supplemental	\$763,622	\$763,622	\$-	\$-
CPPI, Northampton Public Schools	\$59,865	\$59,865	\$-	\$-
Town of West Springfield Office of Community Development	\$9,244	\$9,244	\$-	\$-
Parent fees	\$53,174	\$53,174	\$-	\$-
Shurtleff Children's Services	\$3,044	\$3,044	\$-	\$-
In-kind rents, goods and services	\$884,254	\$-	\$884,254	\$821,317
Other Revenue	\$36,123	\$36,123	\$-	\$-
One-Time HS/EHS	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-
One-Time COVID support revenue ARPA	\$819,114	\$819,114	\$-	\$-
Total revenue and support	\$14,417,379	\$4,329,825	\$10,087,555	\$10,539,049

Volunteers by the Numbers

Volunteers are hugely important to our program and bring skills, talents, and care! Plus, their donated time counts toward the “in kind” match for our federal Head Start grant. This year Head Start parents, family members, and community members spent time in classrooms; joined our Policy Council, Education Advisory Committee, and Health and Family Services Advisory Committee; attended family meetings and extended their children’s learning at home; interned in our program; and donated goods and time to help our community. About 223 volunteers, 182 of them parents, contributed over 1,625 hours of their time!



HEAD START AND EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS OF COMMUNITY ACTION PIONEER VALLEY, INC.

STATEMENT OF EXPENSE WITH BUDGET COMPARISON FOR HEAD START FOR THE YEAR ENDED SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

Expense	Total HS & ELP Actual	Other HS&ELP Actual	Head Start & Early Head Start Actual	Total HS & ELP Budget
Salaries & wages	\$6,827,880	\$2,352,272	\$4,475,608	\$4,607,231
Payroll taxes	\$719,189	\$250,969	\$468,220	\$499,869
Fringe benefits	\$1,067,481	\$306,312	\$761,169	\$735,275
Facility rent & mortgage interest	\$235,662	\$9,602	\$226,059	\$27,695
Facility operations/maintenance/furnishings	\$586,516	\$117,743	\$468,773	\$387,814
Property & general liability insurance	\$35,533	\$8,100	\$27,432	\$24,500
Direct care consultants	\$130,030	\$8,088	\$121,942	\$31,750
Subcontracted direct care	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-
Staff training, conferences & meetings	\$76,874	\$1,009	\$75,865	\$53,800
Staff mileage/travel	\$45,991	\$4,278	\$41,713	\$47,050
Meals and food preparation supplies	\$293,028	\$232,324	\$60,704	\$35,079
Client transportation	\$74,305	\$-	\$74,305	\$80,750
Vehicle expenses	\$37,974	\$2,312	\$35,662	\$24,500
Program supplies/materials and equipment	\$177,206	\$45,799	\$131,407	\$106,130
Office, telephone, advertising and other misc expenses	\$157,639	\$37,558	\$120,081	\$55,938
Depreciation of property & equipment	\$8,922	\$894	\$8,028	\$27,746
Capital expenditures	\$61,191	\$16,191	\$45,000	\$-
In-kind expenses	\$884,254	\$-	\$884,254	\$821,317
Allocation of indirect costs	\$1,324,829	\$437,708	\$887,121	\$843,142
Reimbursable expense	\$12,744,503	\$3,831,159	\$8,913,344	\$8,409,586
Accrued vacation expense	\$21,405	\$21,405	\$-	\$-
Non-reimbursable depreciation expense	\$147,615	\$35,952	\$111,664	\$-
Non-reimbursable indirect costs	\$168,167	\$40,422	\$127,745	\$-
Prior year costs	\$2,784	\$1,220	\$1,563	\$-
Uncollected parent fees	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-
Non-reimbursable expense	\$339,972	\$98,999	\$240,973	\$-
Total expense	\$13,084,475	\$3,930,158	\$9,154,316	\$8,409,586
Net Revenue Over Expenditures	\$1,332,904	\$399,666	\$933,238	\$2,129,463

Head Start Funding Notes

Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care Head Start State Supplemental grant revenue is used to meet a portion of the 20% non-federal match requirement.

Administration for Children and Families Reviews

HS & ELP's most recent monitoring event was a Focus Area 2 review conducted in March 2022 by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). HS & ELP was in compliance on all measures and no corrective action was required.

Community Action's most recent independent audit submitted a consolidated financial statement for the period ending September 30, 2024 and had no material findings.