



MONTACHUSETT OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL, INC.

HEAD START ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

Introduction

Making Opportunity Count Inc. (MOC) Early Head Start and Head Start provides a comprehensive child and family development program for low-income children birth to age five and their families, as well as pregnant women. In addition to early childhood education, children and families receive health and nutrition services, family development support, access to mental health services, as well as supports for children with disabilities. The goal of the program is to improve child and family outcomes, including school readiness, by providing a continuum of comprehensive services that support children's development.

This report provides a snapshot of MOC's program, where 270 Head Start/Early Head Start children were nurtured and educated in North Central Massachusetts. MOC supports these classrooms with Federal and State Head Start grants. In addition to Early Head Start and Head Start, MOC provided 243 children full day/full year childcare services in both center based and family child care options for children 6 weeks to 12 years of age. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Head Start/ Early Head Start enrollment was reduced to 52% capacity during the school year.

In March of 2020, Governor Charlie Baker declared a state of emergency due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Department of Early Education and Care shut down licensed Ma early education programs. MOC quickly turned to virtual programming to meet the many needs of children and families. On June 29th, 2020, MOC opened 13 full day classrooms for children ages 15 months to 12 years of age with reduced enrollment to allow for physical distancing of staff and children.

The program delayed opening the part year Head Start classrooms until October. All public schools opened with a remote option and therefore effecting our workforce with their own young children at home. Head Start families were also reluctant to send children to school due to having older remote learning children and fearing COVID-19.

By October, the program opened 1 part year (4-hour program) classroom and 3 duration (6-hour program) classrooms. A virtual option was offered, and we served 81 children and families throughout the school year. By May, the program opened an additional 3-part day classrooms and continued virtual programming for families who were more comfortable with this option.

Community Needs Assessment

The program completed an annual update to ensure that the community data is still relevant and so we can use the data in our planning.

This has been an unusual year for everyone due to the Coronavirus. This virus affected everyone and made businesses change how they were operating. Offices emptied out while people worked from home, restaurants were only able to provide take out, or use just 50% of their seating capacity. There were long lines at the drive through windows at the banks because lobbies were only open for

appointments, and stores cut hours so they could have time to conduct the extra cleaning required for them to be open. Some small business even closed their doors. All of these factors affected parents' ability to be employed, and thus their need for child care.

Child Care sites closed in mid-March 2020, except for emergency child care sites. The EEC allowed centers and family child care homes to reopen on June 29, 2020, but there were many new regulations that needed to be followed in order for them to open their doors. Staff - child ratios went from having 20 children and 2 teachers in a classroom to having 10 children with 2 teachers. Hours of operations had to change because of the extra cleaning required, and children not being able to mix with others from another classroom. These regulations put a financial burden on anyone operating a childcare business.

The state's childcare waitlist was down by 75% because parents were laid off or chose to stay home because of having older children home from school and not needing care for a toddler/preschooler. When Head Start reopened, parents were given the option of having their child participate in virtual or in person learning. Thirteen full-day classrooms opened at the end of June 2020, 2 in Fitchburg, 3 in Leominster and 8 in Gardner. On October 5, 2020, we expanded to open 3 duration classrooms (in Athol, Clinton, and Winchendon) and one part day classroom in Fitchburg.

Parent were surveyed in early spring to determine what parents needed/wanted for care, leading us to reopen three more-part day classrooms in the spring of 2021 (2 in Leominster and 1 in Gardner). Virtual classes continued for those who preferred that option, but many families were happy to return to in-person services. There were no new childcare centers or classrooms opened by MOC during the pandemic, just existing classrooms being reopened.

Since centers were allowed to reopen at the end of June 2020, 278 centers and family child care homes have reopened in Massachusetts. The DESE website reported that the 14 school districts in our service area had 798 preschool children enrolled for 2020-2021 and 385 of them had IEP's. Early intervention only provided virtual services this past year. Mental health referrals were down for us because they were only offering virtual services. In early 2021, a few organizations started to provide in person therapy for children that really needed it. There was/still is waitlist at all mental health programs.

In March of 2020, the city of Fitchburg was opening one new special education preschool classroom which was in operation this school year.

Public schools in our area offered parents a few different options for their child to participate in learning such as all virtual, hybrid (virtual and in person) or in person for either 2 or 4 days. Public schools provided children with Chrome books for virtual learning. Many schools started with only a virtual option.

Children with special needs were the first groups of children that they brought back to the classroom, in spring 2021. They too had to conduct extra cleaning and had to have protocol for children and staff that showed signs of the virus. With all the extra requirements put on schools and childcare programs, it made it hard for some parents to return to work because of the hours of operation, and children being sent home because of being sick and having to be tested for Covid or quarantining for 10 days. School age programs became virtual classrooms, as parents did need to work.

Many agencies, including MOC, provided food outreach and delivery services to needy clientele in our catchment area. These services from MOC continued throughout the spring and summer of 2020. Many local agencies are continuing to provide Grab and Go meals for families. These include the Fitchburg Salvation Army, YMCA, and the North Central Mass Faith Based Community Coalition. The YMCA had

been serving free meals for years, but during the pandemic the need has increased from their average of 200 meals a month to 1600 meals a month currently.

In June of 2020, 3,096 Massachusetts families with children or expectant mothers were counted as homeless. This does not include families who are sharing living space or “doubling up”. Conditions for the homeless population worsened due to the Covid-19 pandemic as shelters were forced to reduce the number of people they could accommodate. Some families are now being sheltered at the Days Inn in Leominster. The ban on evictions in Massachusetts has prevented many families from becoming newly homeless, but it is still a significant problem in our community.

Area dentists saw fewer children during the pandemic, and some reported they had to lay off staff. Although Head Start families were encouraged to see the dentists, many families did not feel comfortable.

The North Central Area Office of the Dept. of Children and Families shows 107 children 0-2 years that currently have open cases with DCF (*DCF Quarterly Profile, Q2*). Many of these children will need a high-quality child-care experience such as MOC CCHS is able to offer. MOC CCHS has had a strong focus on trauma informed care throughout our last grant cycle and that focus has continued into this grant cycle as well. Many social and emotional supports are in place for enrolled children, and staff as well.

MOC CCHS is fortunate to have the WIC program under its’ agency umbrella. WIC is currently serving 818 children 12-23 months of age, and another 818 from 24-35 months, which also expands our pool of potential eligible applicants next year.

Facts

During the 20-21 school year 18 Head Start classrooms, including childcare, were in operation. In addition to in person services, 81 children were serviced virtually.

Early Head Start is also offered as a home visiting program for pregnant women and children birth to age 3. The EHS homebased services were completed via Zoom due to the pandemic. Head Start services are also provided in a family childcare setting in Leominster and Fitchburg.

In addition to Head Start and Early Head Start, MOC provides full day childcare through center-base and family childcare for children 6 weeks to 12 years of age throughout the Montachusett Region.

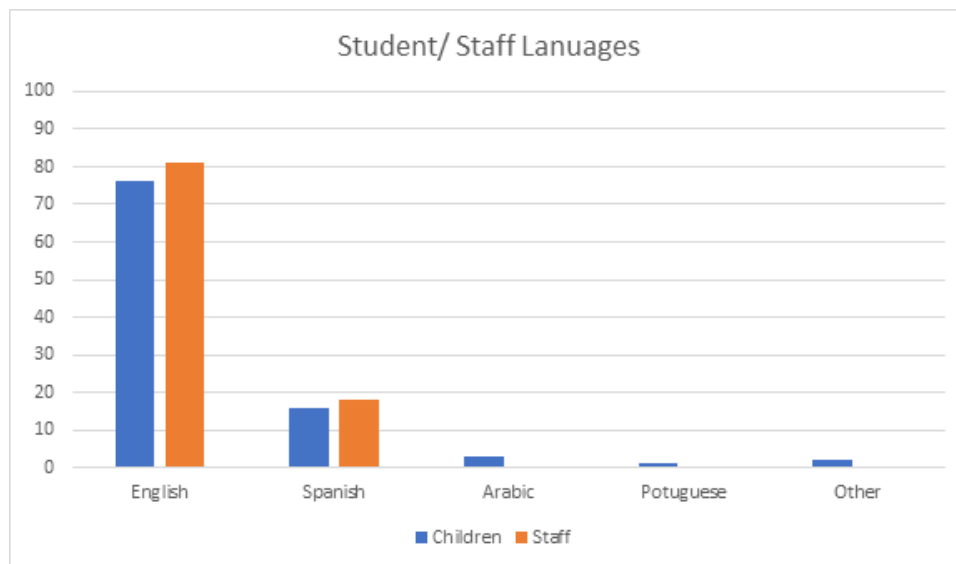
Class Size

Virtual services were provided to children and families from March 2020, until the end of the 19/20 school year. On June 29th, 2020, the program reopened under strict health and safety regulations. Full day programming began with reduced class size to comply with EEC regulations. Full day rooms were staffed with 3 teachers and 10 children. We did not float any staff and implemented several additional health and safety practices including physical distancing, enhanced cleaning, daily health screenings, individual meal service, etc. As the year went on and positive cases declined in our communities, the program slowly increased in person services. In June of 2021, the program began increasing enrollment moving closer to pre-pandemic class size.

Teacher Credentials need HS & EHS

There are currently 44 Lead preschool teachers in the program, 2% have a master's degree in early childhood education, 62% have a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education or a related field, and 36% have an associate degree. There are 3 Assistant Teachers, 2% CDA credential. In our Early Head Start center-based program The Lead Teacher has a bachelor's degree, and 2 Assistant Teachers have a CDA credential. In our Early Head Start Home Based program, our Home Visitor has a bachelor's degree in social work and is enrolled in the Home Visitor CDA credentialing program. Our program is experiencing a shortage of qualified experienced teachers. Due to the lack of work experience, we are utilizing our Early Learning Coaches to complete program orientation with each newly hired staff and to follow them throughout their first year of employment to train them on curriculum, assessment, classroom routines and management and our child data system. This is above the on-going regular observations and feedback provided by the on-site education managers.

Languages of children and staff



Locations

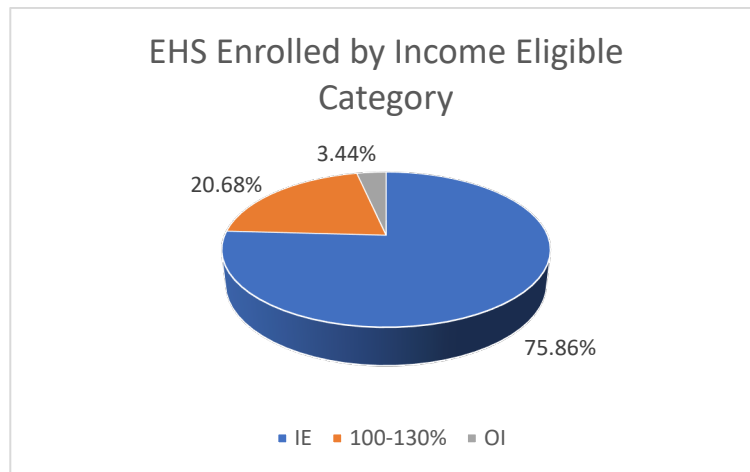
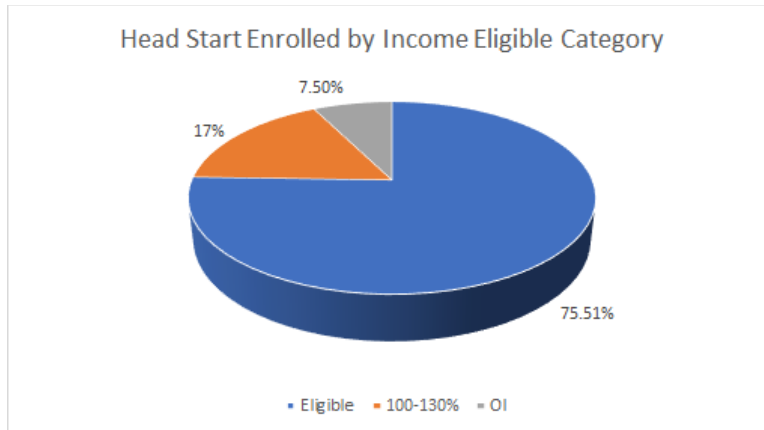
Centers are in Fitchburg, Leominster, Gardner, Winchendon, Athol, and Clinton. Family Child Care Homes are in Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner. Early Head Start is in Fitchburg and Leominster.

Actual Enrollment (% of Funded Enrollment)

September 2020 through June 2021 the program averaged 52% enrollment of 405 Head Start (HS)/ Early Head Start (EHS) children. The Office of Head Start requires that children maintain an 85% of attendance however due to COVID this requirement was waived.

Children Eligible and Children Served

The Head Start program accepted and serviced 241 children of which 182 were considered eligible, 41 were in the 100-130% income range and 18 were over income. In the EHS program a total of 28 children and one pregnant woman were accepted and serviced. One child was over income, 22 were income eligible and six, including the pregnant mom, were in the 100-130% income range.



Medical and Dental Exams

91% of children had an up to date physical, 33% have received preventative dental care. The Covid-19 pandemic restrictions prevented our dental partner, Caring for Kids Dental, from providing its' full range of services this year. Many of our families rely on our on-site CFK visits for their children's preventive dental services, and that has greatly impacted our percentage of children with a current dental exam, which dropped from a high of 76% last winter just prior to the pandemic and temporary closure of many dental offices. CFK may be able to visit a few sites before the end of the school year which will possibly increase our compliance rate. Toothbrushes and toothpaste were sent home, along with education resources regarding the importance of oral health for preschoolers. Parents did a great job on making sure that their children received their annual well child exam, leading to a 91% rate of children with a current physical at the end of the school year.

Family service and health staff will continue to assist parents with securing/renewing health insurance, medical homes and making timely appointments.

Program Governance

Program Governance is a formal structure established by Head Start and Early Head Start agencies for oversight and making operational decisions for quality services for children and families. MOC's

governing body, the Board of Directors (BOD), has a legal and fiscal responsibility to administer and oversee the Head Start and Early Head Start program. The Policy Council (PC) is responsible for the direction of the Head Start and Early Head Start program. These entities working in conjunction with Management Staff ensures that we are in compliance with federal and state laws, policies and procedures are in place, and that day-to-day services are delivered with quality. The BOD is comprised of community members with the expertise and knowledge to make informed decisions in areas such as fiscal management and early childhood education and to have a licensed attorney. The PC is comprised of parents and community members who assume specific responsibilities designated by Head Start Performance Standards, such as recruitment and enrollment, budget planning, and parent engagement activities. 51% of the PC membership must be current parents. Shared Governance practices include having 2 Policy Council representatives serve on the BOD and assist in the communication between BOD, PC, and staff. An impasse policy is in place to resolve internal disputes in timely manner.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the monthly meetings were held via. Zoom.

Budget

Year	Federal or State	Description
2020 - 2021	Federal	Department of Health and Human Services-\$5,536,343 COVID Funding-\$355,918
2020 - 2021	State	Massachusetts Head Start State Supplemental Grant-\$501,177 COVID Funding-\$606,475
Year	Federal or State	Description
2021-2022	Federal	Department of Health and Human Services \$5,536,343
2021-2022	State	Massachusetts Head Start State Supplemental Grant-\$380,021

68% of the budget goes towards personnel related costs.

Results of Financial Audit

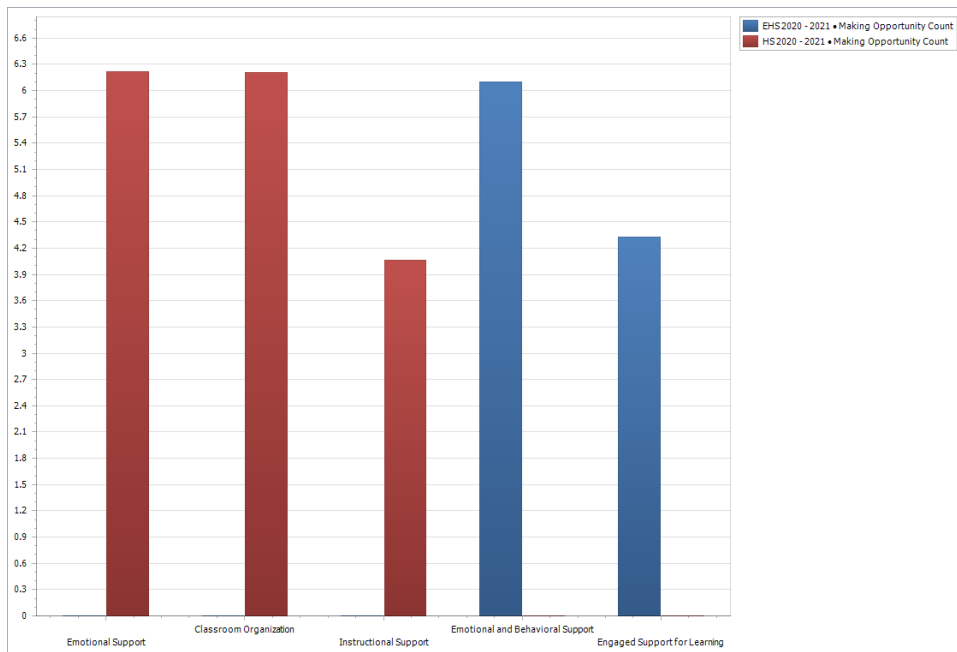
The most recent financial audit for the program contained neither findings nor non-compliances related to CC&HS.

Results of Federal Review

The last review was completed in March 2018. The program was found to be in full compliance.

CLASS Reliable Rating

MOC Child Care and Head Start hires an outside consultant to review all our classrooms in the fall and spring using CLASS reliable raters. This year, our site Education Specialists who are all reliable CLASS observers completed CLASS observations for both in-person and virtual preschool classrooms, and our outside reliable CLASS observer completed Spring observations virtually for all in-person and virtual classroom.

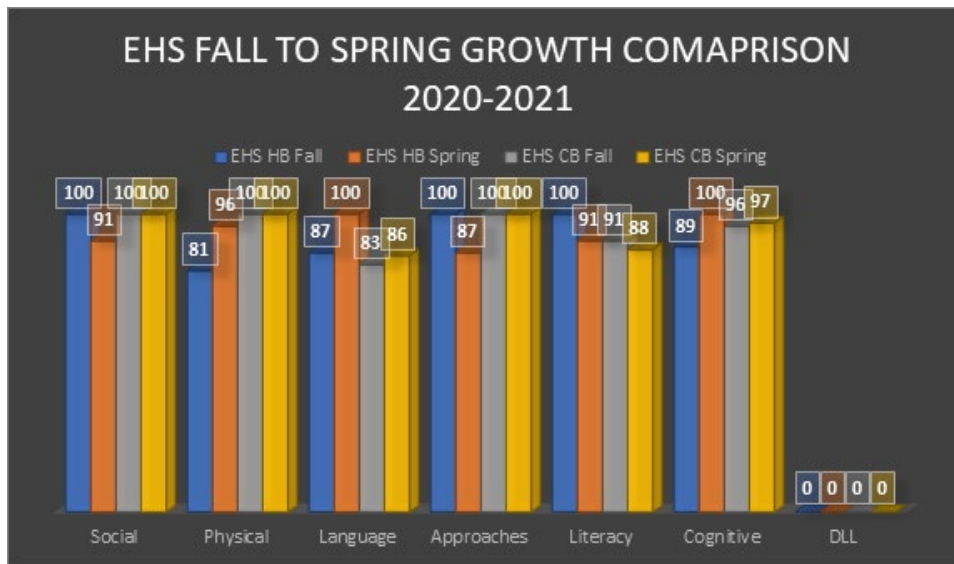
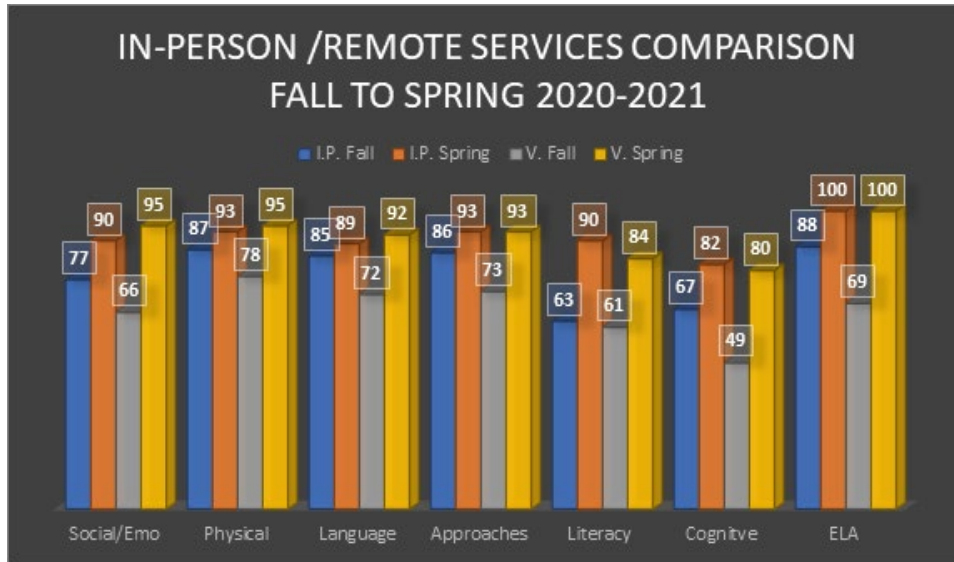


Curriculum

Our preschool classrooms implement the Creative Curriculum 5th ed. It is aligned with the Early Learning Outcomes Framework and state standards. comprehensive and research-based and features exploration and discovery as a way of learning. During the pandemic, our program added the Creative Curriculum Cloud. The Creative Curriculum Cloud enables teachers to transform their planning, teaching, and family engagement experiences in the classroom and beyond. The Cloud platform features content studies that enable teachers to present topics over an extended period of time allowing students to explore, experiment and manipulate materials related to study topics. The Cloud offers real time communication with families allowing enrichment activities to be sent home and parents to collect and share observations, photos and videos with the teachers who can use this documentation in addition to their own to assess children's progress. Teachers can share books digitally with families and many of the books are available to families in an audio format that students can manipulate independently. This allows student and families to be connected to the classroom curriculum to support their child's learning.

School Readiness Skills

Our school readiness plan includes how we assist with preparing children, parents, schools, and the community in improving outcomes for children. We developed this plan with input from local public schools, parents, and members of the MOC Board and Policy Council. Our focus for the upcoming school year for all children is Social Emotional development while physically distancing due to COVID-19. Based on our outcomes data, our focus for this is literacy and cognitive development.



Transition to Kindergarten

Typically, many of our sites sponsor on-site Kindergarten registration for all children transitioning into that community’s public school system. All sites offer workshops for families to assist them for transitioning their child into kindergarten. Many sites are also able to take a field trip to the Public Schools to visit the kindergarten classrooms and meet the teachers. With parental permission, pertinent information such as progress reports and health records, including physical health, mental health and

disabilities sent to the child's school before the fall. On-site applications were able to take place prior to our program closure for one community. This year, due to COVID-19 program closure, one site was able to coordinate with the public school system to have registration packets left outside of our school building. Staff notified parents they were available, and parents came and picked up the packets from outside the building. A date was then set for parents to drop off their completed packet at the public-school building. Another location coordinated with the public school to inform families of the public school's online enrollment, this public-school left packets outside of their school or print them at home; completed packets were accepted at the same location using a Secure Drop Box. Parents were given this information via phone calls, emails, text through Child Plus and applications that were available on the public-school website were printed and given to parents at pick up and drop off. Education Specialists contacted schools regularly to get information on registrations not yet received and both education and family service staff worked together with parents to ensure registrations were completed. With parental permission Education Specialists will complete virtual meetings with public school staff to share information and suggestions on transitioning children to ensure a smooth entrance into public school.

Educators with parental permission have shared pertinent information regarding their transitioning children electronically.

Transition plans for Early Head Start children begin 6 months prior to moving into Head Start or other early childhood programs. Parents are provided information; children completed a virtual classroom visit and pertinent information is shared (with parent permission) to support a seamless transition.

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

Staff and family partnerships are built on mutual respect. Developing positive relationships is important in supporting family well-being, parent/child relationships, and ongoing learning and development for both parents and children. Prenatal and infant care is nurtured by providing comprehensive services, including medical, developmental, and emotional supports.

Staff used the **Positive Parenting Solutions** curriculum, which focuses to promote children's social and emotional skills, understand their problem behavior, and use positive approaches to help children learn appropriate behavior. This is usually a very popular topic of interest for families therefore it was offered twice, once in the morning and one in the evening hours. There were 20 parents in the 4-week sessions prior to April vacation, however only 7 families participated in the second 4-week session. Of the 27 total parents, 15 were single parent families and 12 were two parent households but only one parent attended the session. The Family Service Staff will offer this curriculum to families once more in the coming year, hopefully in person as COVID guidelines continue to change.

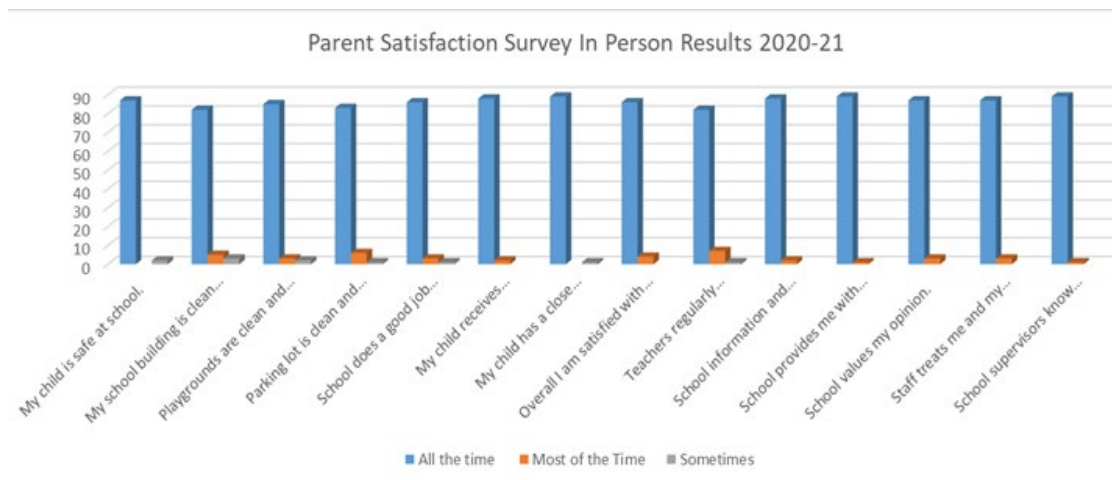
Head Start will be offering other curriculums such as Parenting Journey, Nurturing Families, and CSEFL.

The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Framework principles below are promoted in HS and EHS through Home Visits, Parenting classes, Socialization groups, Financial Literacy, Leadership opportunities, Father Engagement, Family Literacy, School Readiness activities, and Community Connections.

- Families are safe, healthy, and have financial security. Strengths are identified to cope with difficulties and overcome adversity, such as housing, employment, financial literacy, mental health.
- Parents develop warm relationships with their children that nurture their child's learning and development.

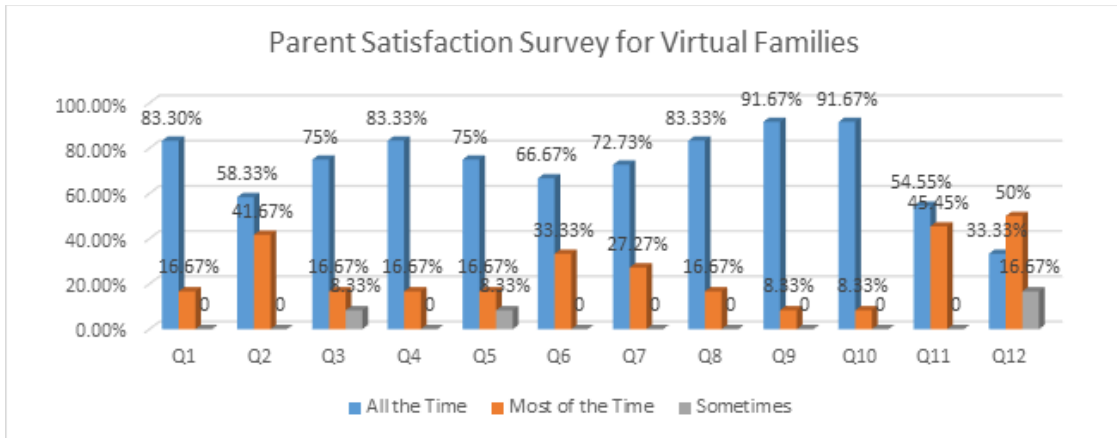
- Families become lifelong educators and are valued as the child’s first and most important teacher.
- Parents advance their own learning and interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and goals.
- Parents are supported to advocate for their child’s learning and development through transitions.
- Parents are partners in transitions for their children through new experiences, such as EHS to HS and Pre-K to Kindergarten.
- Parents form connections with peers and mentors that are supportive and/or educational and enhance their social well-being and community life.
- Parents participate in leadership roles and decision making in ways that improve their child’s development and learning experiences.

The Parent Satisfaction Survey for 2020-2021 was given to families who were serviced in- person. Later a survey monkey was sent out to virtual families so we could also obtain their feedback.



Virtual families completed a questionnaire in survey monkey. Families had to choose All the Time, Most of the Time or Sometimes for the following questions:

1. School does a good job teaching my child.
2. My child receives individualized attention.
3. My child has a close relationship with at least one adult.
4. Overall, I am satisfied with my child’s progress.
5. Teachers regularly communicate with me about my child’s progress.
6. School information and policies are explained in a way that my family understands.
7. School provides me with information and resources to help support my child’s learning at home.
8. School values my opinion.
9. Staff treats me and my family with respect.
10. School supervisors know who I am and are able to listen to my concerns if needed.
11. Are you happy with virtual services?
12. Do you complete the family engagement assignments with your child?



The final question had different options, see below.

