



2022-2023

MAKING OPPORTUNITY COUNT, INC. HEAD START ANNUAL REPORT



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Introduction

Making Opportunity Count Inc. (MOC) Early Head Start and Head Start provides a comprehensive child and family development program for low-income children 15 months to age five and their families. 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 support 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 384 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 an additional 248 children full day/full year childcare services in both center based and family childcare options for children 6 weeks to 12 years of age. Due to a teacher staffing shortage the program was unable to open 2 child care preschool classrooms and our Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms operated on reduced enrollment most of the year. A difficult decision was made to reduce the Head Start slots by 42 children (including closing the Athol classroom) to retain and attract new teachers by offering higher wages.

Facts

During the 2022-23 school year MOC operated 18 Head Start classrooms (9 operated a 4-hour, school year, 3 operated a 6-hour school year and 6 classrooms operated a full working day) and 3 Early Head Start classrooms (full day/full year). MOC is funded for 308 Head Start and 24 Early Head Start slots.

In addition to Head Start and Early Head Start programming, MOC operates child care programming in center-based classrooms, family child care homes and a large school age center.

Class Size

Early Head Start classrooms serve children 15 months to 3 years of age in groups of 8 children. Our Head Start classroom serves children ages 3 to 5 years of age in group sizes of 17 to 18 children. Our full day classrooms have 3 teachers and part day rooms have 2.

Program Goals

#1 MOC Child Care and Head Start will work in partnership with key stakeholders to promote equitable, holistic health outcomes for children, families, and staff.

#2 All children, birth to 5 years, will possess the skills and knowledge necessary for success in school and later learning.

#3 MOC Child Care and Head Start Services will effectively use and communicate about technology and data across all program levels to inform decision-making, align staff to the Program's mission and to continuously improve services provided to enrolled children and families and to the larger community.

Community Needs Assessment

In MOC CCHS's Service Area there are 15,498 infants, toddlers, and preschool aged children (i.e., children ages 0 to 5 years) who, depending on their family circumstances, may require child care and/or early childhood education outside of the home. To accommodate these 15,498 young children, there are 379 different public-school pre-schools and Massachusetts Early Education & Care (EEC) licensed Child Care

Centers and Family Child Care Homes across North Central Massachusetts. Fourteen of these sites are administered by local public-school districts and seven by MOC's Child Care & Head Start Services. The remaining 355 are private center-based/family child care homes. In 2022-2023 an estimated 7,868 children were enrolled in early education and care programs across MOC CCHS's Service Area. Per EEC, an additional 521 were on waitlists for enrollment in subsidized slots.

Of the nearly 15,500 infants, children, and preschoolers in MOC CCHS's Service Area, 11.0%, or 1655 children, are living in poverty and, therefore, categorically eligible for Head Start Services. Given the income disparity between communities within MOC's Service Area, the extreme circumstances of some communities are masked when looked at in aggregate. Several cities and towns have percentages of young children living in poverty higher than Massachusetts (i.e., four of the Six Urban Centers as well as Hardwick, New Braintree, Barre, Lunenburg, Hubbardston, and Townsend) with roughly a quarter of the young children in Winchendon (22.8%), Fitchburg (23.5%), and Gardner (24.9%) and half of the young children living in Hardwick below the Federal Poverty Level.

Given the relative lack of racial/ethnic diversity across the region, these children tend to be White and English speaking. However, children of color are over-represented in the Head Start eligible population (i.e., while 73.3% of the total population of children under 5 in MOC CCHS's Service Area are White only 63.0% of those who live in poverty are White).

Data on prevalence and type of disabilities in the preschool population is limited. Overall, approximately one-third of pre-Kindergarten students in the public schools that comprise MOC CCHS's Service Area have a documented disability. Additionally, 15% of MOC's current Head Start enrollees have documented disabilities, primarily Developmental Delays and Communication-related disabilities. Children identified as having disabilities receive services from the public-school districts as the Local Education Agency (LEA) responsible for implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Young children with disabilities (0-3 years) receive services from the local Early Intervention (EI) and Home Visiting Program providers.

In addition to disability related needs, Head Start eligible families also have nutrition, healthcare, and mental health needs. According to statewide data, approximately 31.7% of school age children in Massachusetts have an unhealthy Body Mass Index (BMI) score. According to MOC's 2022-2023 PIR, 38% of MOC CCHS enrollees have an unhealthy BMI. In order to address nutrition-related concerns for these children, their families, and classmates, MOC CCHS's Nutrition Services provides healthy meals via the Child and Adult Care Food Program as well as nutrition consultation and education. Additionally, MOC CCHS works in close collaboration with the North Central Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which is also a MOC-based service.

MOC CCHS's Health Services ensures that children receive the health and developmental screenings that support overall wellbeing and a readiness to learn. On-site Health Staff prepare educators and classroom spaces to accommodate the health needs of enrolled children, including Asthma, Allergy, Seizure, and Sickle Cell Care Plans as well as meal accommodations and behavioral health medication management. They also provide and coordinate physical exams; dental, vision and hearing screenings; and growth assessments for all enrolled children according to the Massachusetts Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment requirements. Generally, MOC CCHS enrollees are up to date with

recommended care. However, dental screenings have been low since the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding led MOC CCHS to note oral health as an opportunity for improvement in their 2022-2023 Self-Assessment & Improvement Plan.

MOC CCHS's Health Services also facilitates mental health observations and access to play therapy. In academic year 2022-2023, 14 students were referred for Child Specific Observations and 20 were referred for Play Therapy Services. Unfortunately, due to extremely limited capacity within the community for child-focused behavioral health services, just over one-third of those referred for Child Specific Observations (36%) and 60% of those referred for Play Therapy received services. This discrepancy between need and capacity led MOC CCHS to note mental health as an opportunity for improvement in their 2022-2023 Self-Assessment & Improvement Plan.

Parents of preschoolers in MOC CCHS's Service Area have significant needs related to early education, child care, and beyond. Many of these needs stem from the character of the communities in which they live. For example, MOC's Service Area is dominated by low-wage, low-skilled jobs. At the same time, the cost of living in the region is higher than the national average. As a result, families are struggling to pay for housing, utilities, child care, nutrition, and health services. A recent agency-wide community needs assessment which included a Community Needs Survey, Focus Groups, Stakeholder Surveys, CCHS Parent Survey, and Customer Satisfaction Surveys suggests that MOC CCHS families need supports like:

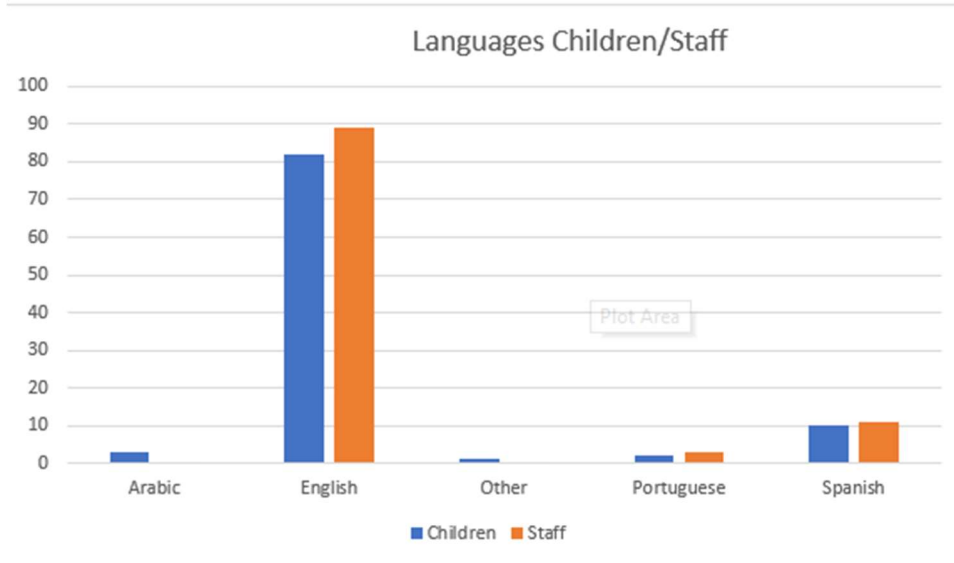
- Housing: affordable housing opportunities; shelter services; housing and utility payment assistance; weatherization services to reduce energy burden and utility costs; and financial literacy education to maximize income.
- Behavioral Health: mental health services, particularly those targeting special populations and using alternative approaches; education about mental health and substance abuse issues and resources; payment assistance; transportation to and from services; and financial literacy education to maximize income.
- Nutrition: healthy food access points; nutrition education; and financial literacy education to maximize income.
- Child Care: more low-cost, conveniently located options with extended hours for all ages; transportation to and from care; and financial literacy education to maximize income.

As a Community Action Agency, MOC is uniquely positioned to offer a broad range of programs and services like those highlighted above. We also recognize the importance of facilitating access to needed services for our families by Bundling Services; leveraging agency capacity by strategically partnering with other community-based organizations and developing our staff; and maximizing impact by capitalizing on widely recognized community strengths.

Teacher Credentials

There are currently 51 educators (42 Head Start, 9 Early Head Start) in our program. Qualifications include: 6% Master's degree, 45% Bachelor degree, 22% have an Associate's degree and 5% have a Child Development Associate. An additional 17% are enrolled in either a CDA program or are pursuing a degree. 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



We were able to hire some Arabic speaking substitute teachers and a floater aide to support children and families who speak Arabic.

Locations

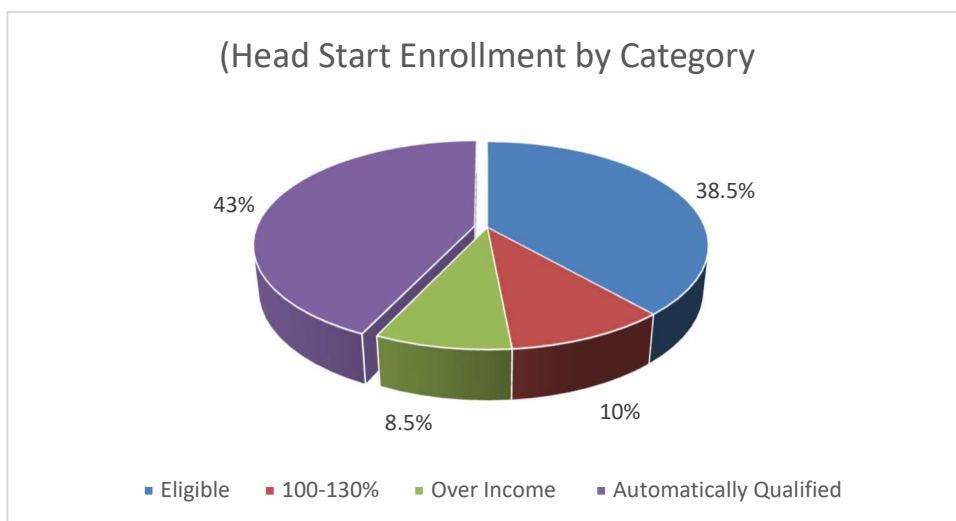
Centers are in Fitchburg, Leominster, Gardner, Winchendon, and Clinton. We were unable to reopen the Athol site in September due to the teacher shortage. Family Child Care Homes are in Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner. Early Head Start is in Fitchburg and Gardner.

Actual Enrollment (% of Funded Enrollment)

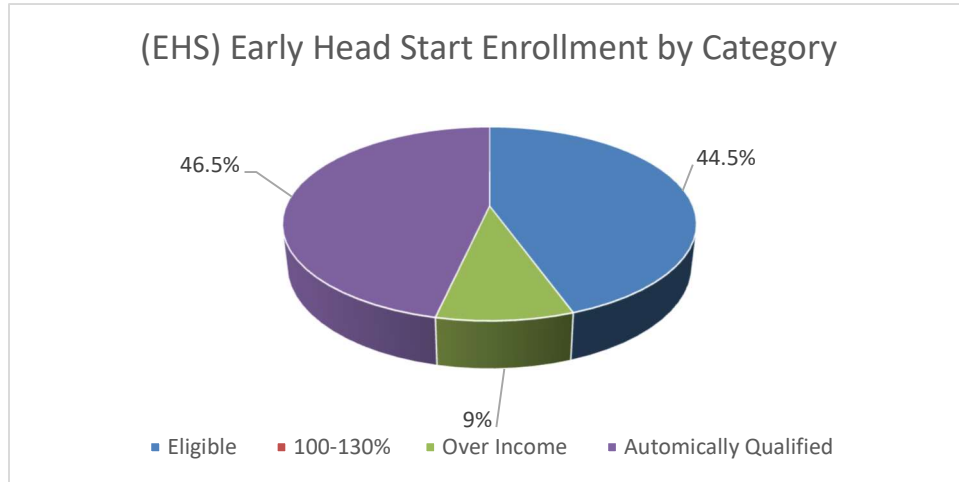
The program began with 73% enrollment in September 2022 for Head Start, with a total of 257 children out of the originally contracted 351 slots and 88% enrollment for Early Head Start (EHS). In May, the Office of Head Start approved an enrollment deduction for Head Start from 351 to 308 contracted slots. The EHS contracted slots remained at 24. The school year ended with 97% enrolled for Head Start and 100% enrolled for EHS. The yearly attendance average was 81% for Head Start and 85% for EHS.

Children Eligible and Children Served

Head Start accepted and serviced 339 children of which 131 were considered eligible, 33 were in the 100-130% income range and 29 were over income. A total of 145 children were considered as being Automatically Qualified for OHS due to being Homeless, in Foster Care and/or receiving SSI, TANF and/or SNAP benefits.

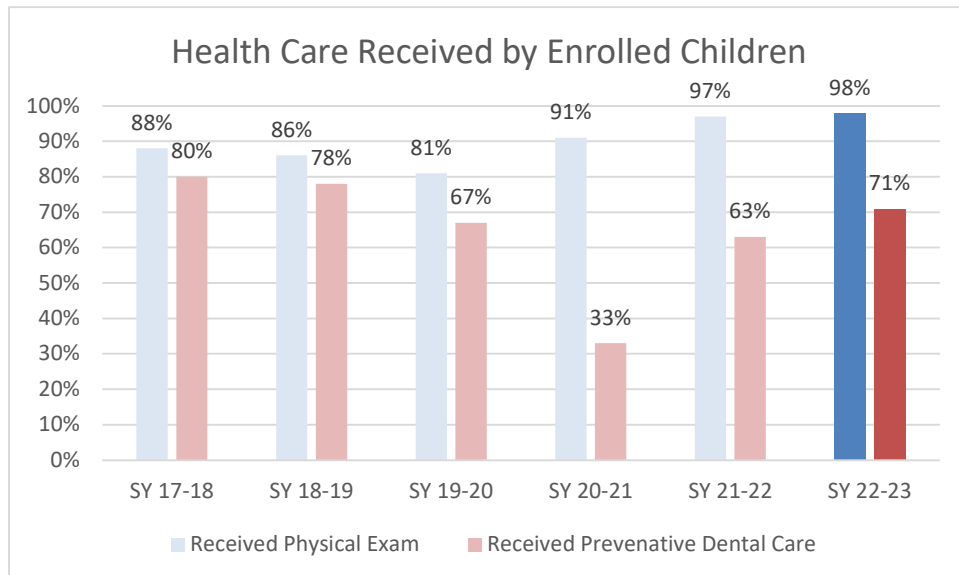


In the EHS program a total of 45 children were accepted of which a total of 4 children were over income, 20 were income eligible and zero was in the 100-130% income range. In addition, a total of 21 children were considered as being Automatically Qualified for OHS due to being Homeless, in Foster Care and/or receiving SSI, TANF and/or SNAP benefits.



Medical and Dental Exams

98% of children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programs received a medical exam within the last year and 71% of enrolled children received preventative dental care within the last year. Our success with maintaining current physical exams on file for enrolled children can be contributed to the efficacy of our data management system and our processes for obtaining releases of information for enrolled children’s medical and dental homes. We are particularly proud of our dental exam rates, which are beginning to resemble pre-pandemic levels. This year our dental partner Caring for Kids completed on site visits to provide preventative dental care to enrolled children and all staff worked to promote participation in these dental programs. Family service and health staff continue to assist families with obtaining health insurance, finding medical and dental homes, and staying up to date with immunizations, exams, and routine screenings.



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 the Management Staff ensure that we are following 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 a timely manner.

Budget

Year	Federal or State	Description
2022 - 2023	Federal	Department of Health and Human Services-\$5,681,284
2022 - 2023	State	Massachusetts Head Start State Supplemental Grant-\$501,177
Year	Federal or State	Description
2023-2024	Federal	Department of Health and Human Services \$6,105,302.
2023-2024	State	Massachusetts Head Start State Supplemental Grant \$501,177

68% of the budget goes towards personnel-related costs.
 COVID-19 funding total was 484,583. Spent to October 2022-\$247,890
 and \$236,693 in 2023.

Results of Financial Audit

The most recent financial audit for the program contained neither findings nor non-compliances.

Results of Federal Review

The last review was completed in May 2022. The program was found to be in full compliance.

CLASS Reliable Rating

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observation instrument used by the Office of Head Start during federal reviews. CLASS assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions in preschool classrooms. CLASS includes 3 domains or categories of teacher-child interactions that support children's learning and development: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. The Office of Head Start's minimum expectations for all Head Start grantees regarding the quality of the classroom learning environment are: Emotional Support-5, Classroom Organization-5, and Instructional Support- 2.3.

MOC Child Care and Head Start hired an outside consultant to review all our classrooms in the fall and spring using reliable CLASS raters. The average program scores were: Emotional Support-6.4, Classroom Organization-6.05, and Instructional Support- 4.76.

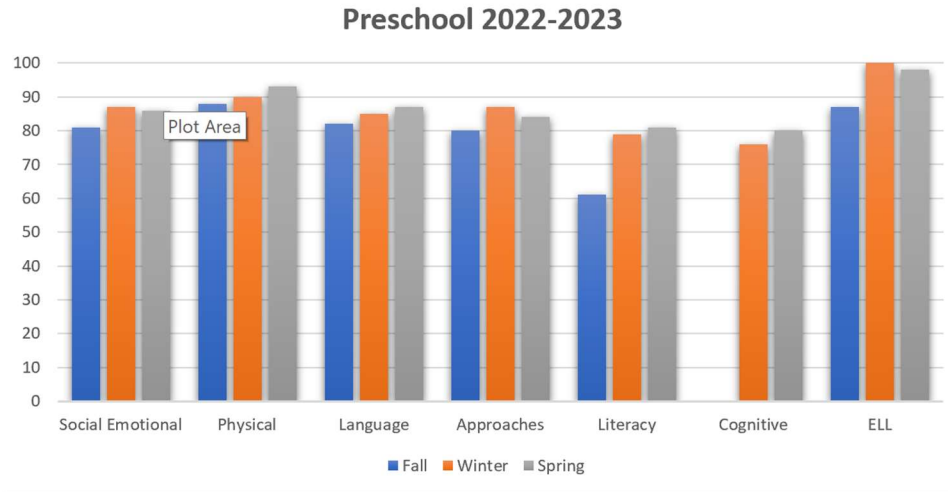
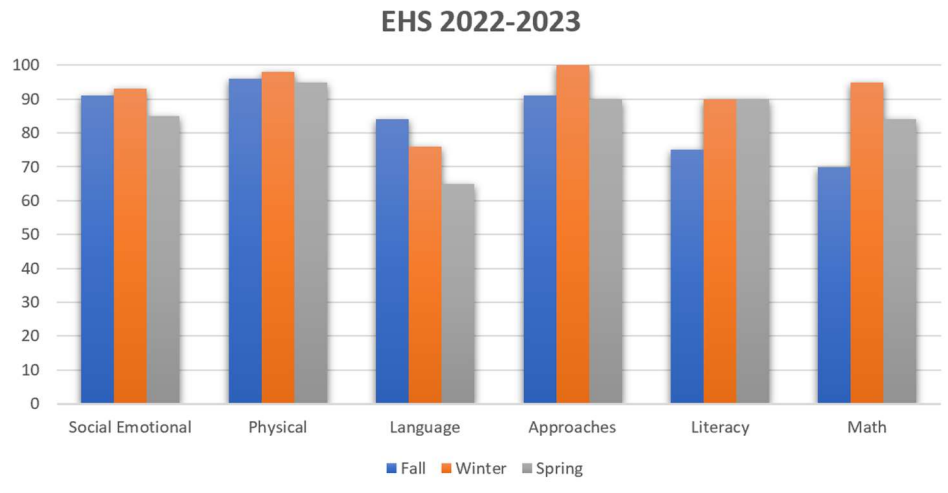
Curriculum

Classrooms use The Creative Curriculum for toddlers and preschoolers to support children's development and learning. Teachers have access to digital curriculum resources that provide study topics to explore over time with children. We use this curriculum to develop lesson plans and small group activities that are individualized according to each child's development and progress. The progress of all children is tracked using the Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment system which is aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Frameworks and MA Early Learning Framework for preschool-aged children.

As a secondary curriculum to support social and emotional development, our program implements the Second Step Early Learning Program. The Second Step Early Learning program teaches preschool-aged children core social-emotional and self-regulation skills, including executive function skills, skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, problem-solving skills, friendship skills, and transitioning to kindergarten.

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. Based on our outcomes data, our focus for this is literacy and cognitive development. The charts below indicate the progress of children's school readiness skills from fall, winter and spring.



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 in transitioning their child into kindergarten. One site was 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 are sent to the child’s school before the fall. 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 engage with public school staff to share information and suggestions on transitioning children to ensure a smooth entrance into public school.

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

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

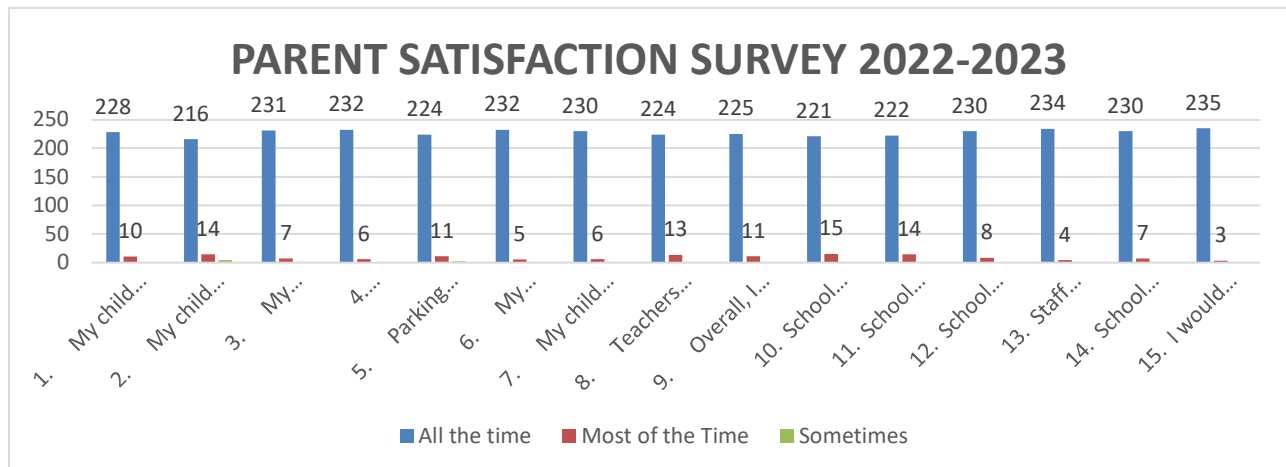
Staff and family partnerships are built on mutual respect. Developing positive relationships is important in supporting family well-being, parent/child relationships, and ongoing learning and development for both parents and children. Prenatal and infant care is nurtured by providing comprehensive services,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

Staff used the **Positive Solutions for Families** 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. Due to this being a very popular topic of interest for families it was offered twice, once in the morning and once in the evening hours. Some sites choice to do this remote while others held it in person. In total 5% of families participated in the curriculum while additional families received this information one to one during home visits.

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 2022-2023 was given to all families so we could also obtain their feedback. Families had to choose All the Time, Most of the Time or Sometimes in the questions shown in the graph below.



Parent Comments:

“Love it here!” “Happy with teachers.” “My child has fun at school.” “Teachers are nice.” “Loves

school, teachers are awesome.” “Getting my child ready for K.” “Parking could be better, it is limited.”
“Never got me links for TSG.” “I am satisfied w/the service provided. MOC is a good environment for my
son to come to every day.” “We are always welcomed.” “I'll recommend MOC for anyone.” “My child
has shown signs of social and educational improvement, her vocab and social skills are great. Thank you!”
“School staff are amazing. All staff are wonderful.” “Teachers are wonderful.” “Love program, great
people.” “Always love head start.” “Child loves new school, teachers & friends.” “Best Head Start.
Thanks to MOC staff for great support.” “Great!”