

**Vermont Head Start State Collaboration Office
2008 Needs Assessment of Head Start and Early Head Start**

**Executive Summary
September, 2009**

Introduction

The Head Start Act of 2007 requires the Head Start State Collaboration Offices (HSSCOs) to conduct a needs assessment of Head Start and Early Head Start grantees to learn how to better support them in coordinating, collaborating, and aligning services for children and families. Additionally, the Head Start Act requires HSSCOs to use the results of the needs assessment to develop a strategic plan outlining how the HSSCO will assist and support grantees to meet the requirements of the Head Start Act for coordination, collaboration, transition to elementary school and alignment with K-12 education. HSSCOs must update the needs assessment and strategic plan annually, and make the results available to the general public within the state.

The Vermont HSSCO embraced this opportunity to expand its understanding of the grantees' needs, and increase visibility and impact on state and local policies, procedures, and initiatives that benefit low-income young children and their families.

Survey

The needs assessment, conducted in the fall of 2008, asked grantees to provide ratings on the extent of their involvement with service providers and organizations, and degree of difficulty accessing services and activities for Head Start children and families in the nine federal priority areas (see list below). All seven Vermont Head Start/Early Head Start grantees responded to the online survey.

The survey consisted of a background information section about the grantees' programs and respondents, followed by questions about the nine HSSCO priority areas:

- Health care
- Services to children experiencing homelessness
- Welfare/child welfare
- Family literacy
- Child care
- Community services
- Services to children with disabilities
- Education:
 - Partnering with pre-k
 - Transition and alignment with k-12
- Professional Development

The results of this needs assessment will inform the future direction and strategic planning of the Vermont Head Start State Collaboration Office "to facilitate collaboration among Head Start

agencies (including Early Head Start agencies) and entities that carry out activities designed to benefit low-income children from birth to school entry, and their families” (Head Start Act of 2007).

Using the results of the survey, a strategic dialogue was held with key stakeholders to review the survey results, identify the most significant needs in the federal priority areas, and begin to identify strategic goals to advance collaboration, coordination and alignment of services between Head Start programs and state and local services, activities and organizations. These findings will be the foundation from which to develop the strategic plan.

The survey identified **extent of involvement** along a continuum from “no relationship” to “collaboration” and the **degree of difficulty** ranging from “extremely difficult” to “not at all difficult” that Head Start programs experience in addressing the needs of low-income children and families in the nine priority areas.

In order to focus on strategies to address the greatest needs and challenges while building on strengths and successes, we selected those with the lowest level of involvement and most difficulty in accessing services as our priorities.

Results

This report highlights the areas that could benefit from increased involvement with the assumption that more collaboration will lessen the difficulties with services and activities. The following illustrate the areas of least involvement, greatest difficulty, and recommendations for future planning.

The data show that Head Start has low levels of involvement with the following aspects of key priority areas (see Table 4 for the complete list):

- McKinney-Vento liaisons in schools
- Title 1 Directors
- Other nutrition services (not WIC)
- Community health center
- English language learner programs
- Law enforcement
- On-line courses and programs for professional development
- Children’s fitness and obesity prevention programs
- Emergency services

The data show that Head Start has the most difficulty with the following aspects of key priority areas (see Table 7 for the complete list):

- Coordinating transportation with LEAs
- Sharing data/information with health-related services on children enrolled in Head Start
- Obtaining timely evaluations of children suspected of having delays or disabilities

- Engaging with community partners providing services to children experiencing homelessness for cross-training and planning purposes
- MOUs with pre-k partners that prioritize enrollment for children experiencing homelessness
- Helping families get transportation to medical appointments

Areas where strengthening relationships hold the most promise for promoting child and family development

- Increased involvement with key individuals in LEAs, the Vermont Department of Education, and area homeless agencies in assuring that young children’s learning and development needs are met
- Increased identification and involvement with nutrition and food security, obesity prevention, and children’s fitness programs
- Increased knowledge of and partnership with professional development resources, such as Northern Lights Career Development Center, higher education institutions, local child care and LEA-based training and staff development, and cross-training with social service providers and organizations
- Developing MOUs with each LEA providing publicly-funded pre-k services
- Emergency services
- Law enforcement

Areas where difficulties in accessing activities need to be addressed through involvement at the state or local level

- Timely evaluations of children suspected of having delays or disabilities
- Transportation to schools and medical appointments
- Assisting parents with limited English ability to communicate with LEAs for smooth transitions to kindergarten
- Working together with LEAs and community pre-k providers to prioritize children experiencing homelessness for enrollment
- Working with welfare systems to encourage joint outreach and enrollment
- Aligning curricula and assessment practices with LEAs

To review the full report please use this link:

For more information and/or questions, contact K.C. Whiteley at 802-241-2705 or email:

kc.whiteley@ahs.state.vt.us