



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

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Program Performance Summary Report

To: Authorizing Official/Board Chairperson

Mr. Randy Piersall
Abilene Independent School District
241 Pine St
Attention: Federal Programs-Head Start
Abilene, TX 79601 - 5911

From: Responsible HHS Official

Date: 04/30/2020

Dr. Deborah Bergeron
Director, Office of Head Start

From January 27, 2020 to January 31, 2020, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted a Focus Area Two (FA2) monitoring review of the Abilene Independent School District Head Start and Early Head Start programs. This report contains information about the grantee's performance and compliance with the requirements of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) or Public Law 110-134, *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*.

The Office of Head Start (OHS) would like to thank your governing body, policy council, parents, and staff for their engagement in the review process. Based on the information gathered during this review, we have found your program meets the requirements of all applicable HSPPS, laws, regulations, and policy requirements.

Please contact your Regional Office for guidance should you have any questions or concerns. Your Regional Office will follow up on the content of this report and can work with you to identify resources to support your program's continuous improvement.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE REPORT

Copies of this report will be distributed to the following recipients:

Mr. Kenneth Gilbert, Regional Program Manager
Mrs. Cheryl Cunningham, Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director
Ms. Jennifer Putnam, Head Start Director
Ms. Georgiana Reagan, Early Head Start Director

Glossary of Terms

Opportunity for Continuous Improvement (OCI)	<p>An OCI is identified when the grantee is determined compliant in an area; however, through intentional, continuous improvement strategies, the agency has the opportunity to enhance overall program quality.</p>
Area of Noncompliance (ANC)	<p>An ANC is identified when the grantee is out of compliance with a specific federal requirement. The grantee is given a specified corrective action timeline wherein the ANC must be fully corrected. If not corrected within the specified timeline, the uncorrected ANC becomes a deficiency.</p>
Deficiency	<p>As defined in the Head Start Act, the term "deficiency" means:</p> <p>(A) a systemic or substantial material failure of an agency in an area of performance that the Secretary determines involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) a threat to the health, safety, or civil rights of children or staff; (ii) a denial to parents of the exercise of their full roles and responsibilities related to program operations; (iii) a failure to comply with standards related to early childhood development and health services, family and community partnerships, or program design and management; (iv) the misuse of funds received under this subchapter; (v) loss of legal status (as determined by the Secretary) or financial viability, loss of permits, debarment from receiving Federal grants or contracts, or the improper use of Federal funds; or (vi) failure to meet any other Federal or State requirement that the agency has shown an unwillingness or inability to correct, after notice from the Secretary, within the period specified; <p>(B) systemic or material failure of the governing body of an agency to fully exercise its legal and fiduciary responsibilities; or</p> <p>(C) an unresolved area of noncompliance.</p>



Program Management and Quality Improvement

Program Management

The grantee establishes a management structure consisting of staff, consultants, or contractors who ensure high-quality service delivery; have sufficient knowledge, training, experience, and competencies to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of their positions; and provide regular supervision and support to staff.

Ongoing Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

The grantee uses data to identify program strengths, needs, and areas needing improvement; evaluate progress toward achieving program goals and compliance with program performance standards; and assess the effectiveness of professional development.

Program Governance

The policy council is engaged in the direction of the program, including program design and planning of goals and objectives.

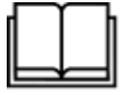
The grantee maintains a formal structure of program governance to oversee the quality of services for children and families and to make decisions related to program design and implementation.

Program Management and Quality Improvement Highlight

Abilene Independent School District (AISD) created an organizational structure that supported the delivery of high-quality services. The Head Start Management Team's longevity helped to provide high-quality services in all areas. The AISD Head Start and Early Head Start program staff had an average tenure of 7 years. Eight of the coordinating staff had been with the program for 21 years. This longevity allowed the Management Team to develop comprehensive systems to support the delivery of quality services. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected for each content area using multiple online data platforms, checklists, spreadsheets, and classroom observations. Managers and coordinators analyzed the data to inform their monthly reports, to monitor their compliance in meeting the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and to develop program goals. They also used the data to identify needed supports for staff. Each new staff member had a mentor, teacher, and coach in all component areas who helped them understand all services available for families and how they related and worked together. For all returning teachers, the Management Team met to discuss coaching needs based on observations from the previous year and any classroom concerns. Staff reviewed their goals with supervisors three times per year, and coaching was ongoing. Weekly staff meetings also included professional development topics to support staff's continuous learning. AISD's organizational structure supported the grantee's ability to provide high-quality services.

The grantee maintained full and active participation of children who were dual language learners and their families by continually assessing program and community data. The City of Abilene was designated a resettlement site for African refugees who spoke Swahili. The program partnered with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to provide Swahili interpreters to ensure families could communicate in their home language. The IRC also provided an interpreter once a week for the classrooms where their children were enrolled. The program had partnerships with the local universities to provide translation services for less commonly spoken languages of the refugees. Sixteen of the Head Start certified teachers and four of the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) held English as a Second Language (ESL) certification. Certified staff had Sheltered Instruction Training, which provided strategies and supports for dual language learners. The grantee delivered high-quality services to dual language learners through community partnerships and the internal capacity of staff who were trained to provide services to dual language learners.

The grantee's governing board and the policy council were actively involved in supporting the program through the review of data and guided program decision making. The board adopted practices allowing members to make informed decisions regarding the oversight of the Head Start program. The board held monthly meetings with workshops held before their meeting. The workshops included training and information on action items for members to review, to ask questions, and to make suggestions. The policy council members stated they were actively engaged in reviewing data, made program decisions, and provided input on needed services. Annually, the policy council members participated in the Self-Assessment and assisted staff in analyzing program data to identify strengths and areas of growth. The policy council also had an active part in creating goals for the program based on the Self-Assessment results. The grantee's governing body and the policy council engaged in training and data review throughout the year, allowing them to be active in decision making.



Monitoring and Implementing Quality Education and Child Development Services

Alignment with School Readiness

The grantee's school readiness efforts align with the expectations of receiving schools, the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF), and State early learning standards.

Effective and Intentional Teaching Practices

The grantee's teaching practices intentionally promote progress toward school readiness and provide high-quality learning experiences for children.

Supporting Teachers in Promoting School Readiness

The grantee prepares teachers to implement the curriculum and support children's progress toward school readiness.

Home-based Program Services

Not Applicable.

Monitoring and Implementing Quality Education and Child Development Services Highlight

The grantee implemented strategies and practices to support successful transitions for children and families from Early Head Start to Head Start. Early Head Start and Head Start staff worked together on school readiness plans. Transition activities were incorporated into the Early Head Start classroom and staff assisted children in developing self-help skills, such as carrying their food in the cafeteria, walking in a line, and potty training. The Early Head Start teachers completed a Student Learning Profile, detailing each child's learning strengths and shared the profile results with the Head Start teacher. The transition process was supported by Family Advocates who assisted families in understanding the transition process. Family Advocates also took children and parents on tours through their new Head Start center. Family Partnerships were reviewed and modified between Early Head Start and Head Start, and parents were introduced to their new Head Start Family Advocates. Bus drivers were also involved in the transition by having parents and children ride on the bus. If the child had an Individualized Family Service Plan, disabilities staff helped the parent understand what to expect and helped them plan for the transition to an Individualized Education Program. Timelines for transitions and classroom schedule information were shared at parent meetings. The Mental Health Coordinators shared any pertinent information about the child or family with staff. The transition process between Early Head Start to Head Start included a collaborative approach among staff to prepare the children and families.

The program created a coaching program to meet the needs of the teaching staff. The coaching model for Early Head Start included a 12-week cycle for all new teachers. Teachers learned about curriculum, assessment, health, and safety during these 12 weeks. The coach followed the training with observing and modeling practices in the classrooms to ensure teachers understood the implementation of their learning. In Head Start, the grantee had three types of coaching, self, peer, and intensive. Coaching occurred one time per week, two times per month, or monthly. Coaching was provided based on the teacher's needs and based on the makeup of the classroom. For example, if a tenured and skilled teacher had a particularly difficult class, the grantee designed coaching to support the teacher in providing individualized and group activities to help all children be successful. The grantee's coaching program provided personalized support based on each teacher's individual needs.

The program assisted teachers in providing effective classroom management and creating positive learning environments. All teachers reported receiving support from the Education Coordinators, behavioral coaches, academic coaches, and mentor teachers. Teachers attended weekly meetings where professional development was offered on topics teachers requested, such as planning lessons, increasing language and literacy skills, and creating ideas for math and science activities. Teachers received strategies for the classroom to provide effective classroom management and positive learning environments through mental health consultation visits and feedback. The grantee provided support to teachers to ensure positive learning environments and increase classroom management skills.



Monitoring and Implementing Quality Health Services

Child Health Status and Care

The grantee effectively monitors and maintains timely information on children's health status and care including ongoing sources of health care, preventive care, and follow-up.

Mental Health

The grantee supports a program-wide culture that promotes mental health and social and emotional well-being, and uses mental health consultation to support staff.

Oral Health and Nutrition

The grantee maintains and monitors for effective oral health practices and nutrition services that meet the nutritional needs and accommodate feeding requirements and allergies.

Safety Practices

The grantee implements a process for monitoring and maintaining healthy and safe environments.

Services to Pregnant Women

The grantee provides quality services that facilitate pregnant women's access to health care and provide information to support prenatal, postpartum, maternal, and infant health and emotional well-being.

Monitoring and Implementing Quality Health Services Highlight

The grantee ensured ongoing and follow-up care in health services for all children. The staff helped parents follow the recommended schedules of well-child and oral health care by providing health education and reminders for future health and dental needs. Nurses tracked exams and follow-up treatments according to the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment schedule. The grantee purchased the Spot Vision Screener to screen children at the time of enrollment. This ensured children received glasses in a timely manner. As of January 2020, 39 Head Start and 15 Early Head Start children were referred and received glasses for the current program year. By purchasing the Spot Vision Screener, the grantee was able to screen children at the time of enrollment and support families in obtaining needed glasses, which supported children's learning and development. The program had effective practices to ensure children received the required health services.

The grantee created a mental health support system for children, families, and staff. Mental Health Coordinators, paraprofessionals, mentor associate teachers, and behavior coaches were available to staff, families, and children. These staff conducted classroom observations and provided strategies, modeling, and coaching. Mental Health and Education Coordinators conducted joint classroom observations and then discussed whether behavioral concerns were environmental or mental health concerns and the best strategies to implement. The grantee could provide these mental health services due to the high level of financial support provided by the Abilene Independent School District. The mental health support allowed children, families, and staff to gain the skills needed to improve mental health and social-emotional well-being.

The program ensured children brushed their teeth once a day. Children brushed teeth upon arrival as part of the morning routine. Toothbrushes were sanitized daily and replaced monthly. For infants in Early Head Start, the infant's gums were swabbed daily. Pictures were posted in the classrooms providing visual cues for brushing teeth. The program supported children in maintaining effective oral health practices.

The grantee had a system to keep all facilities, materials, and equipment safe. The system included many health and safety checklists completed by different staff members and agencies. Teachers completed daily classroom and playground checklists and submitted them to the Safety and Transportation Coordinator for monitoring. Identified concerns were entered in the grantee's online work order system and were addressed promptly, usually within 24 hours. The Coordinator sent monthly safety check emails to all Head Start staff that included reminders about tasks, such as checking plug covers and flashlight batteries, making certain chemicals were out of reach for children, and locking gates upon exit. Additional health and safety checks included an annual inspection of all aspects of the building and equipment by school staff and other biannual campus

safety checks completed by the Coordinator. The fire marshal checked all fire extinguishers and completed a fire safety checklist that looked at items like built-in emergency lighting. The City of Abilene completed food inspections in the cafeteria twice per year. The grantee had a system of preventative maintenance and monitoring to ensure environments were safe.



Monitoring and Implementing Quality Family and Community Engagement Services

Family Well-being

The grantee collaborates with families to support family well-being, parents' aspirations, and parents' life goals.

Strengthening Parenting and Parent-Child Supports

The grantee provides services that strengthen parent-child relationships and support parents in strengthening parenting skills.

Family Engagement in Education and Child Development Services

The grantee provides education and child development services that recognize parents' roles as children's lifelong educators and encourage parents to engage in their child's education.

Monitoring and Implementing Quality Family and Community Engagement Services Highlight

The grantee worked closely with families to identify their strengths and needs and to set goals for their families. Family Advocates (FAs) met with families to complete the strengths and needs assessment and then addressed each family's needs by providing resources and connecting the family with agencies in the community. The FAs explained to parents this was a partnership between them and the families, and they worked together to develop and strategize ways to meet their goals. Families achieved their goals with the support of the FA, who used PROMIS, a data software that monitored and tracked their communication with families. The grantee supported families in identifying strengths and needs and helping them choose and meet family goals.

The program offered a variety of father engagement activities to encourage male involvement. The program developed fun events to get fathers and father figures involved in their child's development. They held Breakfast with Dads each year to introduce them to the Strong Fathers, Strong Families curriculum, and to encourage them to be involved and attend fatherhood events. There were 218 father figures who participated in this event in October 2019. Early Head Start had a Camp Crockett event with fathers with activities themed around camping, 35 males attended. Head Start hosted a science night with fathers, with 56 males in attendance, that included activities they could bring home to encourage science learning. The grantee also encouraged fathers to be a part of Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) and encouraged fathers to volunteer to read in the classroom with children. Early Head Start fathers reported reading over 426 times with their child during this program year. Head Start hosted a reading event, and 85 fathers attended with their children. The grantee's fatherhood program garnered attention in the community and was featured in several local news stories. The participation of fathers in program activities increased supportive relationships for children.

The program offered parents the opportunity to practice parenting skills and to build upon their knowledge by implementing the Conscious Discipline curriculum in the home and the classroom. They provided Conscious Discipline training through an eight-class series and sent home handouts quarterly. Family Advocates and teachers implemented the curriculum during home visits. On each home visit, they focused on one major part of the curriculum to perform in the home, like finding a safe place or breathing. Parents and teachers used the Conscious Discipline vocabulary regularly, and both reported it helped to create a positive environment for everyone. The grantee's implementation of the Conscious Discipline curriculum provided additional support to parents.



Monitoring and Implementing Fiscal Infrastructure

Budget Planning and Development

The grantee develops and implements its budget to sustain management, staffing structures, and the delivery of services that support the needs of enrolled children and families.

Ongoing Fiscal Capacity

The grantee plans and implements a fiscal management system that supports the organization's ongoing capacity to execute its budget over time and meet the needs of its organization.

Budget Execution

The grantee's financial management system provides for effective control over and accountability for all funds, property, and other assets.

Facilities and Equipment

The grantee complies with application, prior approval, and reporting requirements for facilities purchased, constructed, or renovated with Head Start funds.

Monitoring and Implementing Fiscal Infrastructure Highlight

The grantee's budget development process included the governing Board and the policy council. The Executive Director of Federal Programs (EDFP) drafted the budget utilizing the program's Self-Assessment, Community Assessment, and a review of the program's goals and objectives. Priorities were determined based on discussions and data review with the Board, the policy council, and program staff. The Board and the policy council also received monthly financial and program reports to inform budget development decisions. The draft budget was then revised based on the program's priorities and submitted to the policy council and the Board for approval. The Board and the policy council used financial and program data to support their active role in developing the budget.

The grantee employed qualified fiscal staff to provide effective financial oversight. The grantee had multiple levels of qualified employees managing the finances of the Head Start and Early Head Start program. The Chief Financial Officer had a master's degree in accounting and was a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). The Director of Finance had a master's degree in accounting and was a CPA, and the Director of Accounting had a bachelor's degree in financial management. The fiscal staff used their expertise to provide effective internal controls for program funding. The Frontline integrated software was used to track and monitor financial activities, including approved cost allocations, and funds were identified through a control number assigned to the department and fund. All purchases followed an extensive process from approval to payment. The Accounting Managers, the Program Director, and the EDFP could initiate a requisition, with the EDFP reviewing all requisitions before they were uploaded into the Frontline system. Next, the Accounting Manager processed the requisition, and it would then proceed to the purchasing department. Lastly, the purchasing department placed the order, received the order, verified the packing slip to the requisition, and sent the invoice to the Accounts Payable department for processing. Qualified staff and effective financial management allowed for safeguarding Federal funds.

Monitoring ERSEA: Eligibility, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance

Determining, Verifying, and Documenting Eligibility

At least 10 percent of the grantee's total funded enrollment is filled by children eligible for services under IDEA or the grantee has received a waiver.

The grantee enrolls children or pregnant women who are categorically eligible or who meet defined income-eligibility requirements.

Enrollment Verification

The grantee maintains and tracks enrollment for all participants including pregnant women.

Monitoring ERSEA: Eligibility, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance Highlight

The grantee established procedures to support staff in accurately verifying eligibility and maintaining full enrollment. All Early Head Start and Head Start staff received training to support compliance in making eligibility determinations. A review of 78 eligibility records found all documentation was collected, maintained, and verified to ensure families were eligible for services. Families were selected for enrollment based on the number of points from the program's selection criteria. After enrollment, staff educated families on the importance of attendance and monitored children's absences. Family Advocates and Specialists worked closely with teaching staff, district staff, and families to ensure regular attendance and created attendance plans when needed to support families. When a vacancy occurred, the program used its waitlist to notify the family with the highest number of priority points of the opening. The program was well known in the community and received referrals from over 70 community partners. As a result, the grantee maintained a waitlist and was fully enrolled, with over 10 percent of its funded enrollment filled by children with disabilities. The grantee's detailed processes supported its success in enrolling eligible families and maintaining full enrollment.

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