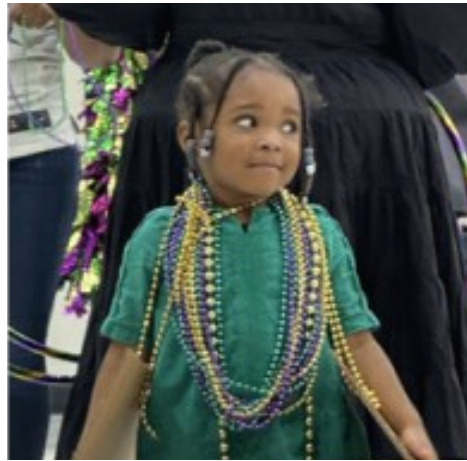




ANNUAL REPORT

2024



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
EXTENSION

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Board of Directors	Policy Council
Anissa Pace - Board Chair	Johnquila Bullock - Chair
Dr. Ashten Yost - Early Childhood	Shante Richardson - Vice Chair
Taylor Brinkley - Attorney	Lauren TenEych - Secretary
Josh Ervin - Fiscal	Tomiko Walker - Treasurer
Hunter Andrews	

MISSION

MSU Extension Head Start strives to promote optimal development of each child and his/her family through positive learning experiences and high-quality service.

HEAD START LOCATIONS

MSU-Extension Head Start Administrative Office

521 34th Street
 Gulfport, MS 39507
 Phone: 228-241-2181
 Email: msuheadstart@ext.msstate.edu

East Biloxi Head Start

590 Division Street
 Biloxi, MS 39530
 Phone: 228-967-7290

Gaston Point Head Start

1526 Mills Avenue
 Gulfport, MS 39501
 Phone: 228-731-3746

Gilbert Mason Head Start

4221 Popp’s Ferry Road
 D’Iberville, MS 39540
 Phone: 228-967-7257

FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



Dr. Louise E. Davis
Executive Director



Jamila B. Taylor
Director, Head Start and EHS

Mississippi State University Extension Head Start/Early Head Start's 2023 - 2024 Annual Report is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our staff in serving the children and families in Harrison County. We are also keenly aware that we cannot do the jobs that we do without the trust and support that we get from our local community – our partners, our Board and Policy Council and most of all our parents who place their most precious assets in our care. We would like to thank you for your continued interest and investment of time and energy to our program. We are committed and invested in providing the highest quality of service to the children and families served within our Harrison County communities. Our goal is to serve as a model of excellence in early care and education throughout the nation. A recent visit from the Head Start Bureau resulted in the recognition of our commitment to wellness for our staff and children and encouragement to share our innovative approach with Head Start programs across the country.

As always, we are humbled by the support of our staff, our partners, our Board and our Policy Council. We are proud to provide excellence in early childhood services and are committed to remaining the best and safest option for children and families in our service area.

Although there is no way to report all the wonderful things from this program year, we hope this glimpse offers a look at the outcomes that will have a long-lasting positive impact on this part of the state.

Yours in Service,

Louise and Jamila

FROM OUR BOARD

As we reflect on another year of service to the Harrison County area, I'm so pleased to have the honor to serve as the Board Chair for MSU Extension Head Start for another year. The Board and staff have worked tirelessly to innovate and improve services for children and families while focusing on a holistic approach – education, family services, health, nutrition and mental health. I am grateful for the staff's commitment and thank the community and stakeholders for support and resources that have contributed to another successful year. It is again a pleasure to share with you the results of our dedicated team. This report is an example of how we have had a positive impact on hundreds of children and families.



We believe every child, regardless of their circumstances at birth has the ability to reach their full potential. We are in this together and it is our privilege to continue to bring Head Start services to you. As we begin another year of working with young children and their families, we are committed to providing high quality services to our children.

Anissa Pace, Board Chair



ABOUT US

The MSU Extension Head Start and Early Head Start program, offered in Harrison County, is designed to help children and their parents make an easier transition from early childhood program to kindergarten. The program combines local partnerships with research-based education methods to serve children at this most critical stage of life.

Our Head Start centers proudly serve the communities of Gilbert Mason, East Biloxi, and Gaston Point, with Linda Lyons being our Early Head Start center. Our commitment to providing quality early-childhood education extends through our partnerships with local school districts, including Gulfport School District and Biloxi Public School District. In collaboration with Moore Community House and Shine Early Learning, we can offer comprehensive support and services. Moore Community House houses our Early Head Start program, including the Linda Lyons Center, while Shine Early Learning plays a vital role in providing valuable program support. While serving the children of Harrison County, MSU Extension will be working to build a successful model that can be shared and replicated statewide.



From February 13-17, 2023, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted an intensive Focus Area Two (FA2) monitoring review, focusing on interviews as well as policy and procedure reviews. Reviewers visited centers and classrooms to monitor and complete safety checks as well as file audits for both children and personnel. On March 27, 2023, we received a very positive report that included only one noted area of improvement regarding lack of documentation for lead free paint for school-based partnerships. The review identified several areas of strength, including our facilities and the

learning taking place in each center, family engagement supports, monitoring for health and safety, wellness program, ERSEA and the documentation provided to support our efforts across service areas, HR and fiscal systems and our partnership programs. The lead reviewer commended our progress in just four years. Through our efforts we will change the narrative for our most vulnerable children and families in Mississippi.

VISION

THE MSU-EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDES RESEARCH-BASED INFORMATION, EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER FOCUSED ON ISSUES AND NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE OF MISSISSIPPI, ENABLING THEM TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR ECONOMIC,

STATE OF THE STATE

In overall child well-being, Mississippi ranks only behind New Mexico. The table below, (taken from *Mississippi Kids Count Factbook 2024*), shows Mississippi is the last ranked state in both Health and Family and Community metrics, 47th in Economic Well-Being, and 32th in Education – up from last year’s rank of 39th, however for young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school, the state again fared worse than the previous year with an estimated additional 2,000 children not in an educational setting. While the number of children in poverty dipped by an estimated 2,000 children, the number of children living in households with high housing costs increased by an estimated 5,000 children. A child’s chances of thriving depend not only on individual, family, and community characteristics but also on the state in which she or he is born and raised. States vary in wealth and other resources. Policy choices and investments also influence children’s chances for success.

	Indicator	Year	Number	Percent/Rate	Rank
Economic Wellbeing 47 th	Children in Poverty	2021	189,000	28%	50
	Children whose parents lack secure employment	2021	241,000	35%	49
	Children living in households with a high housing cost burden	2021	194,000	28 th	28
	Teens not in school and not working	2021	12,000	7%	24
Education 32 nd	Young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school	2017-2021	38,000	50%	8
	Fourth graders not proficient in reading	2022	N/A	69%	28
	Eighth graders not proficient in math	2022	N/A	82%	46
	High school students not graduating on time	2019-2021	N/A	12%	17
Health 50 th	Babies with low birth rate	2021	4,339	12.3%	50
	Children without health insurance	2021	46,000	6%	6
	Child and teen deaths per 100,000	2021	405	55	50
	Teens who are overweight or obese	2020-2021	N/A	41%	48
Family & Community 50 th	Children in single-parent families	2021	292,000	45%	49
	Children in families where the head of the household lacks a high school diploma	2021	76,000	11%	39
	Children living in high poverty areas	2017-2021	152,000	22%	50
	Teen births per 1,000	2021	2,545	26	49
2024 Mississippi Kids Count Factbook					

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

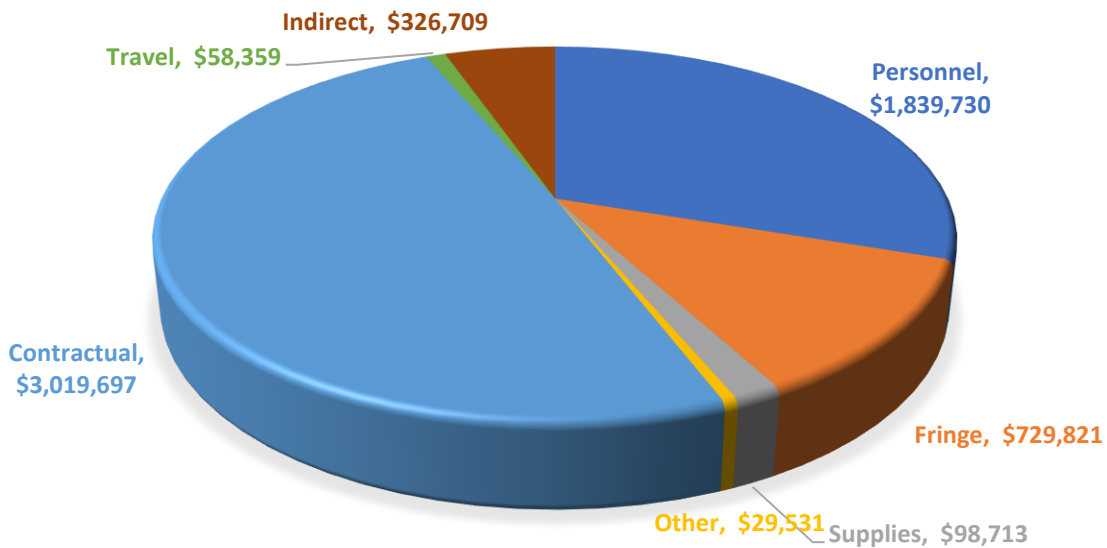
		Head Start	Early Head Start
Total 2022-2023 Federal, state, and local funding \$6,605,333	Base	\$4,878,147	\$1,151,735
	Quality	\$123,825	\$41,275
	COLA	\$273,176	\$64,497
	TTA	\$46,111	\$26,567
	Total Funding	\$5,321,259	\$1,284,074

MSU Extension Head Start has administrative and system-wide fiscal capacity and financial resources to implement, manage, report on, and achieve the goals and objectives of Head Start and Early Head Start grant. At all stages of implementation and management, the MSU team follows policies and procedures relating to maintaining fiduciary and financial responsibility for all grant activities; keeping accurate payroll and accounting data, records, and archiving of supporting documentation for all charges; preparing and submitting expenditure reports; certifying expenses are true and correct; classifying and reporting accounting transactions properly; and maintaining procurement records.

We have intensive monitoring guidelines and practices to ensure that all federal money passed through to partners is used appropriately, and that the funds spent on this program are reasonable, allowable, and allocable to Head Start. The Board and Policy Council have a robust role in setting program priorities through their input and review of budgets and expenditures as standing agenda items at regular meetings.

MSU Extension Head Start is audited as a part of the University system and has maintained unqualified opinions of Extension services throughout our tenure a Head Start grantee. The University administers more than \$60 million annually in total funding across all programs with all the finance, grant accounting and compliance measures in place for ensuring the maintenance of fiduciary and financial responsibility for all activities. Reviews of other MSU early childhood programs have consistently reflected the strength of our financial accountability systems.

2022-2023 EXPENDITURES



2022-2023 Head Start Budget

	Head Start	Early Head Start	Total
Personnel	\$1,825,974	\$13,756	\$1,839,730
Fringe	\$724,364	\$5,457	\$729,821
Travel	\$55,879	\$2,480	\$58,359
Supplies	\$98,713	\$0	\$98,713
Contractual	\$1,865,009	\$1,154,688	\$3,019,697
Other	\$0	\$29,531	\$29,531
Indirect	\$324,788	\$1,921	\$326,709
Total Budget	\$4,894,727	\$1,207,833	\$6,102,560

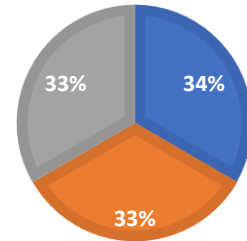
STAFFING

We are extremely fortunate to have a high number of dedicated staff who are well trained and supported to work with our children and families. Over the past several years, we are seeing a shift in the education levels of our staff with the majority of Head Start teachers holding an associate degree (60%). There has been a drastic drop (40%) over the past year in the number of staff with a bachelor's degree with current percentages at 33%. For Early Head Start, the percentages are evenly proportioned with a third of teaching staff holding an associate degree, another third with a CDA and the remainder without current credentials, but in classes leading to a degree or credential in early childhood education. Approximately half have an associate degree or higher, with the remainder holding a CDA in infant/toddler education.

Even with our high-quality staff, we are facing the same challenges as other Head Start programs throughout the nation in finding and retaining qualified staff to work in classrooms. Early childhood, with traditionally low pay, is a field that is struggling to attract candidates and even when we hire staff, the burnout rate is incredibly high. Our profession is seeing record numbers of staff across the nation voluntarily leaving their jobs; we are no different. In the past year, we were unable to open several classrooms due to the inability to recruit, hire and retain staff to safely operate classrooms. As such, we were able to serve approximately ½ of our funded enrollment. In addition to the difficulty in finding qualified staff, we also face challenges in keeping staff. In the past year, we had 6 Early Head Start staff leave, all of whom were teachers and an astounding 27 Head Start staff out of 37 total staff (73%). Out of those 27 staff, 17 (63%) were education staff. For the 33 staff who left, only 26 were replaced during the school year, leading to a negative impact on continuity of care for our children served in those classrooms. In exit surveys of staff leaving the organization, we are finding a myriad of reasons for the vacancies. The majority (53%) left for work in similar fields, such as local school systems at a higher rate of pay.

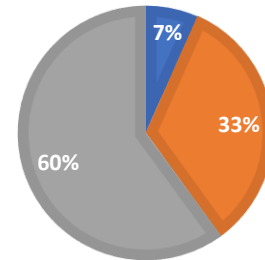
EARLY HEAD START TEACHERS

■ Associates ■ CDA ■ None



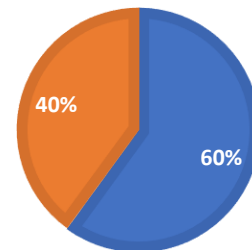
HEAD START TEACHERS

■ Masters ■ Bachelors ■ Associates



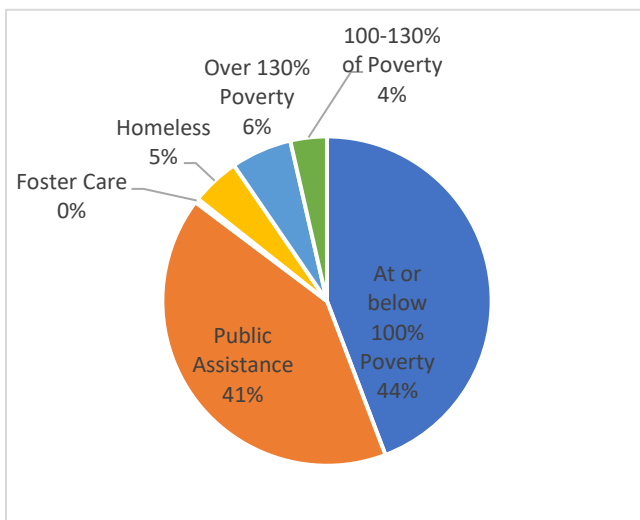
HEAD START TEACHER ASSISTANTS

■ None ■ CDA



SNAPSHOT OF PARTICIPANTS SERVED

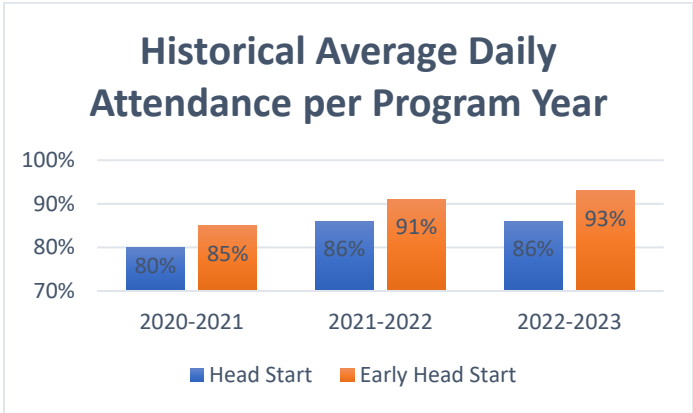
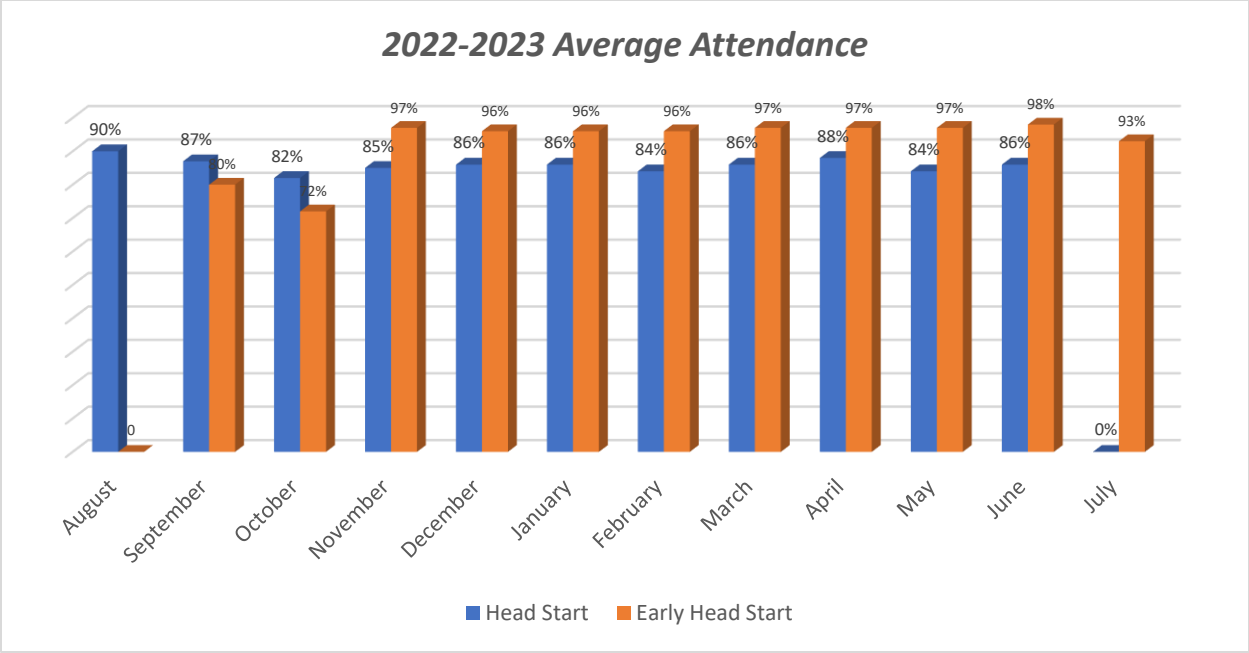
MSU is funded to serve 488 Head Start and 64 Early Head Start for a total of 552 children in three Head Start centers that MSU Extension has oversight of: East Biloxi Head Start, Gilbert Mason Head Start, and Gaston Point Head Start. In addition, we have a partnership with one of the local school districts, Gulfport School District, where we have 5 pre-K classrooms; 1 classroom each that are housed at 5 different elementary schools. East Biloxi Head Start is currently housed at Nichols Elementary in Biloxi, MS with the region serving families in the Biloxi Public School District. Gilbert Mason is located in D’Iberville within the Harrison County School District. Gaston Point Head Start is located in Gulfport, and along with the partnership program, serves families in the Gulfport School District.



Over the course of the 2022-2023 school year, our program served a total of 220 children in Head Start as well as 31 children in Early Head Start. Our Early Head Start program is in partnership with Moore Community House and located at our Linda Lyons Early Head Start in Gulfport, MS. In 2022-2023, 44% of our children were income eligible – living at 100% of the federal poverty level, which for a family of 4 is \$27,750 per year. Another 41% of our children qualified through categorical eligibility including foster care, public assistance or homeless (5%). We estimate there are 2,875 income-eligible Early Head Start infants and toddlers and 1,812 income eligible Head Start

children in Harrison County. At full capacity, we would serve 2% of the eligible Early Head Start population and 27% of the Head Start population in our service area.

Early Head Start and Head Start have staggered starts, accounting for a month without enrollment in each. The critical staffing shortage of qualified early childhood professionals sweeping the nation has had a tremendous impact on us locally. As a result of that, and lingering effects of COVID, we had capacity of approximately half of our funded enrollment. Our attendance reports are based on the number of open classrooms.



The following chart shows the number of children/families were served by center during the 22-23 program year, the total numbers/percentages of children with physical and dental exams.

Location	Children Served	Families Served	Physical Exams	%	Dental Exams	%
East Biloxi Elementary	38	35	36	95%	36	95%
Gaston Point	39	33	39	100%	39	100%
Dr. Gilbert Mason	59	53	56	95%	58	98%
Gulfport Partnership	84	83	74	88%	74	88%
Total Head Start	220	204	205	93%	207	94%
Linda Lyons (EHS)	31	28	26	84%	26	84%

Race/Ethnicity of Participants

- Black - 69%
- Black/Hispanic - 1%
- Asian - 2%
- White/Hispanic - 4%
- White - 9%
- Biracial - 7%
- Other/Hispanic - 8%



We serve diverse children and families and are continuing to see increases in our Hispanic/Latinx population. Twenty-nine of our children are Dual Language Learners, with most of those children being proficient in Spanish (90%), but also a few families whose primary languages are Middle Eastern or East Asian. We strive to ensure that we can communicate with children and families in their home language by providing staff and partners who have the ability to interpret and translate important information.

FOCUS ON WELLNESS



The Executive Team observed the positive response of our wellness efforts and decided to host a staff appreciation event centered around wellness. Held at Centennial Plaza, overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, the event featured recognition, music, fellowship, prizes, games, delicious food and more. It aimed not only to express gratitude to the staff, but also to showcase MSU’s approach to staff wellbeing to community partners and collaborators.



In the absence of income incentives or pay raises, the Executive Team further highlighted workplace wellness by organizing a wellness retreat at the Grand Hotel in Point Clear, Alabama. This retreat was meticulously planned to provide staff with opportunities for relaxation, rejuvenation and engaging in wellness activities. One of the most impactful moments of the retreat was a mindfulness event hosted by MSU’s Health and Nutritionist and Wellness Coordinator. Staff members were reminded of the importance of self-care and left feeling emotionally uplifted and motivated. Building upon these efforts, MSU has furthered its commitment to staff wellness by creating quarterly Wellness Newsletters.

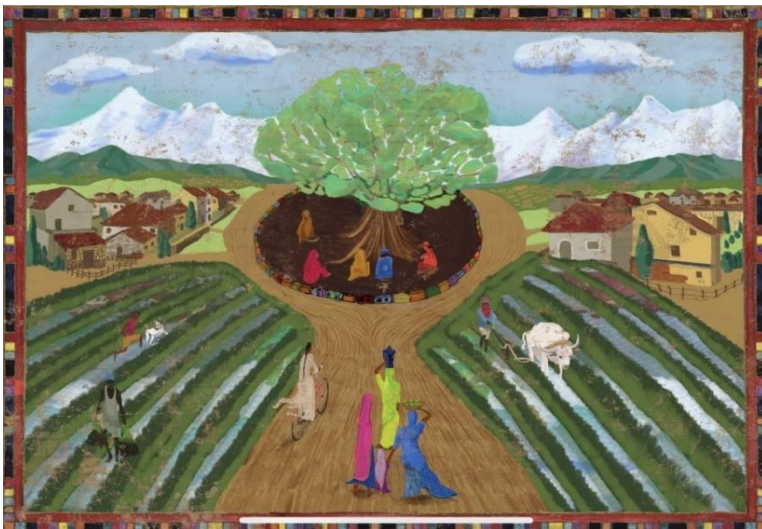
Since its inception, MSU Head Start has remained committed to prioritizing staff wellbeing, recognizing it as essential for the program’s success. The aim is to serve as a model for other Head Start programs within the region and beyond, ensuring that staff members feel supported and valued. As one staff member aptly put it, “I never

knew what it meant to indulge in self-care, but after this, I know that I not only need it, but I deserve it.” This sentiment reflects MSU’s dedication to our community and caring for the things that truly matter.

PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our relationships with parents begins as soon as we take an application for a child, when we discuss parent’s hopes and dreams for their child. We set the stage for the importance of the parent’s involvement in their child’s educational journey. When the child is accepted into the program, we hold a parent orientation where we discuss what parents can expect from us and how they can be an essential part of the program. Because of our focus on child health, we also talk to the family about partnerships we have with community health experts, such as The Vision Center, South Mississippi Smiles, and Coastal Family Health Clinic who provide on-site services for children as necessary.

The King family, led by Martin King, had two children, Ondrea and Onana enrolled in our program. Martin would accompany them to school every day, a journey taking 8-10 minutes on foot. However, during inclement weather, he couldn’t bring them, as walking was his sole means of transportation. Witnessing his dedication, our program rallied together to provide Mr. King a bicycle equipped with a trailer, facilitating their daily commute to school regardless of weather conditions. This assistance also aided him in attending medical appointments and managing daily tasks. Mr. King expressed his gratitude, unable to fully articulate his feelings beyond a heartfelt “thank you”. The joy evident in his smile conveyed his appreciation.



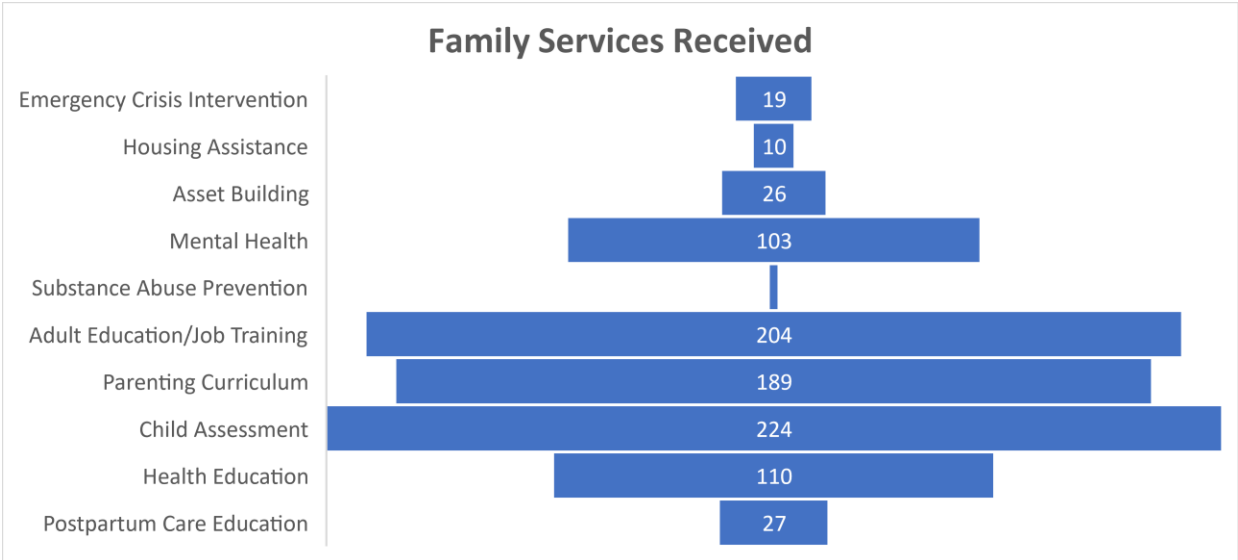
Our focus for family services centers around a quote from the Child Development Group of Mississippi: "Head Start was not a Kindergarten, but a Communigarten." We directed our efforts towards providing tools and resources that we believed our families and children would benefit from in our "communigarten." These areas included family engagement activities promoting rich environments, language and literacy, connecting families with community resources, and offering parenting classes.

Some of the activities we organized included starting the year with parents participating in a Parent Cafe where we engaged in a fun activity of potting plants to symbolize our "Communigarten" theme and to

plant the seeds that families need to grow successfully. We also hosted a fall festival where we invited community partners to set up vendor tables to share resources with staff and families.

Among the community partners present were Feeding the Gulf Coast, our partners in the Backpack program, providing nutritious and easy-to-prepare food for hungry children over the weekend. Additionally, we invited Happy Healthy to conduct a food demonstration for our families and how to read food labels. South Mississippi Smiles and Canopy Children's Solutions were also in attendance, providing dental services and other family support to our families in the program.

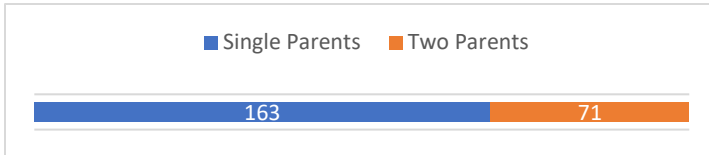
Other significant activities from last year were the launch of our Family Learning Parties as part of our Parent Curriculum, Shine On, Families. The theme was "Blast off into a Bright Future," where families joined their children, teachers, and family advocates to model high-quality adult-child interactions used



in classrooms. These parties focused on family life practices such as family routines, positive discipline, expressive language, and literacy, aiming to get families excited, motivated, and engaged in their child's learning journey. Lastly, the University of Southern Mississippi offered parenting classes focusing on child development stages, setting boundaries for children, positive discipline, and improving communication with children.

Other Family Metrics

- One or more parent employed – 169.
- Active military parent – 7
- Grandparents raising grandchildren – 5.
- One or more parent in school – 17



Matteo Madrid and his family immigrated to the US seeking asylum. Upon arrival, his mother faced the challenge of finding childcare to enable her to seek employment, while Matteo, struggling with communication barriers and behavioral challenges, remained silent. After his first year in school, we facilitated an evaluation for an Individualized Education Program leading to the initiation of supportive services that notably improved Matteo’s communication skills. With our assistance, his mother secured employment and arranged after school care for Matteo. By his second year, Matteo began to express himself more confidently, in English and Spanish. His behavior also showed marked improvement, fostering his mother’s growing confidence. Through active participation in Family Engagement Network meetings, Matteo’s mother found her voice, becoming increasingly outspoken. By the end of the school year, she had remarried, introducing a new father figure into Matteo’s life, marking a significant evolution for their family.

PREPARING OUR CHILDREN FOR KINDERGARTEN

Everything we do with the children enrolled in the MSU Extension Head Start program is to help them become successful in the school setting – from classroom practices and experiences to training for parents. Our ultimate goal is to leverage community partnerships and research-based methods to establish a strong program that serves children at their youngest and most vulnerable stage in life, so they experience optimal outcomes. Throughout the year, we utilize hands-on opportunities to expand children’s learning experiences. Teaching staff use multiple modalities to teach children in a variety of settings – indoor, outdoor, mealtime and transitions. Throughout the year, teachers were able to individualize needs as each child required and build upon skills and abilities as children grew and learned.



We strive to create a seamless experience at each transition (from home to Early Head Start to Head Start to the local school system) so the child has a good experience and can be comfortable in the new educational setting. Our Head Start program brings high-quality, early childhood educational experiences in a fun atmosphere, laying a strong foundation for success. Each classroom is equipped with materials and supplies geared toward enhancing children’s school readiness. We take a holistic approach in working with children and families, taking care to ensure they are physically and mentally healthy, have well balanced diets and opportunities for home learning environments that are extensions of the classroom. For children enrolled in our school district partnerships, assessment and subsequent individualization is based on information from Renaissance to determine the child’s educational journey.

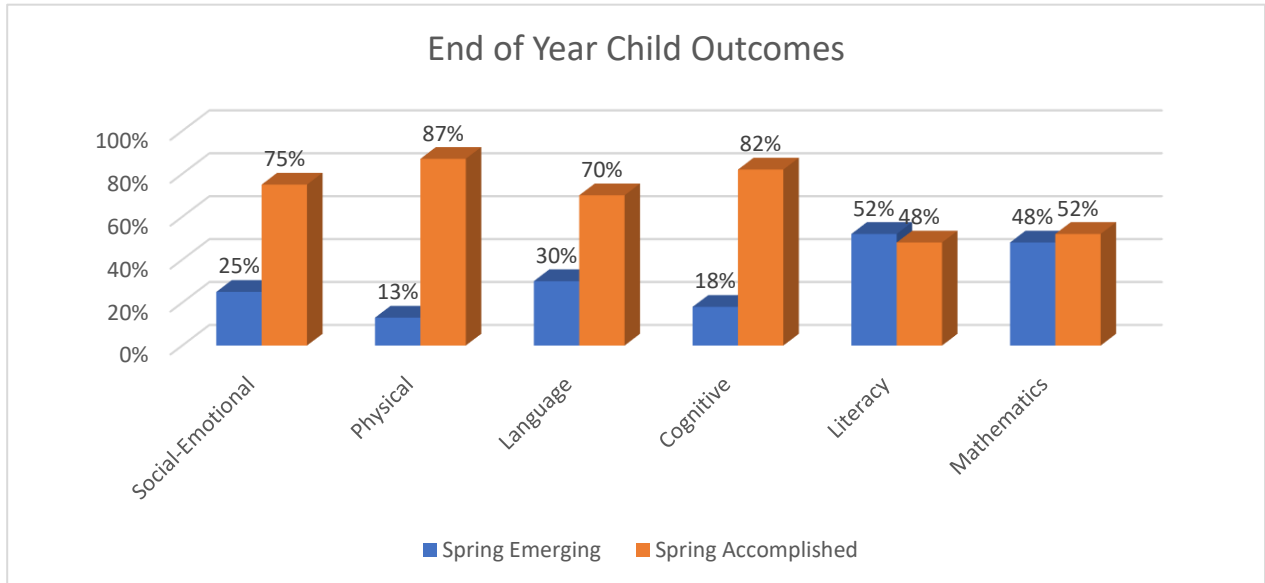
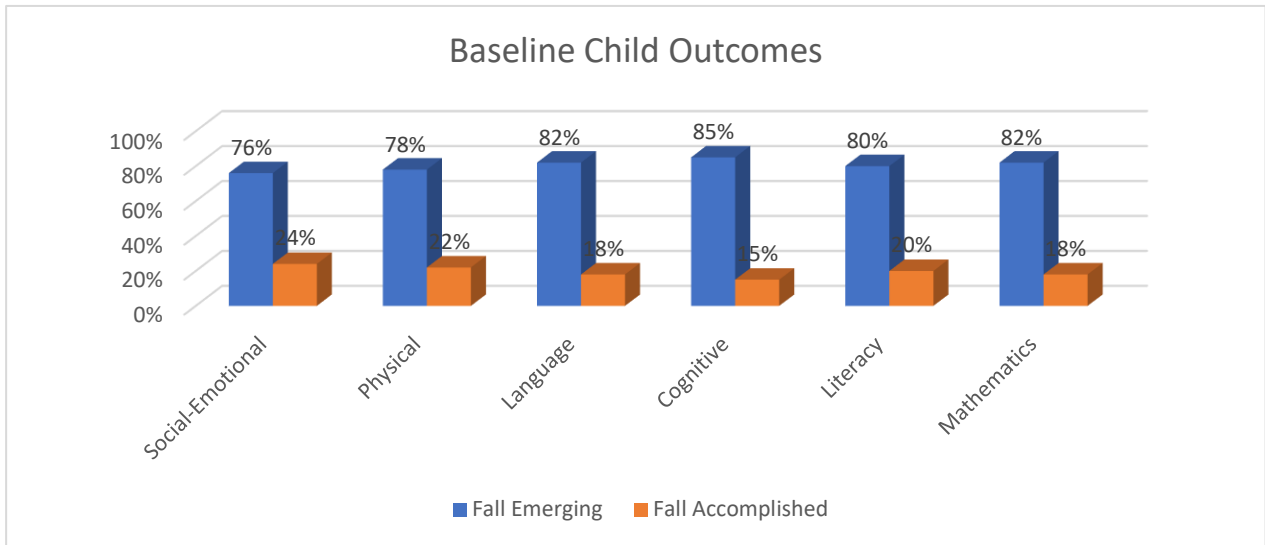


At the beginning of the year, we assess each child in educational domains that are developmentally appropriate for their age group – Social Emotional, Physical, Language, Cognitive, Literacy and Mathematics. The following charts demonstrate the growth of our children from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. There is tremendous growth in all areas as the percentages flip from emerging skills at the beginning of the year to accomplished at the end of the year. We recognize that there is still much room to improve in the areas of mathematics and literacy and plan educational professional development to assist teachers in practices proven to improve child outcomes in those specific areas.

To support and guide the approach to education, we have a School Readiness

Committee that consists of staff, parents and community leaders who assist in analyzing outcomes and providing input on educational activities throughout the year. Throughout the year, staff build a transition portfolio to present to parents with samples of the child’s growth. Periodically throughout the year, the staff will meet with parents to review outcomes and discuss areas of strength as well as areas where learning can be targeted.

As children approach Kindergarten entry, we provide parents with information on the receiving schools,



registration information, and times they can visit. They also receive information regarding kindergarten camp where children can meet their prospective teachers and tour the school – including the cafeteria, library, classroom and playground. At the end of the school year, parents receive a “report card” with materials to support a child’s growth over the summer months.

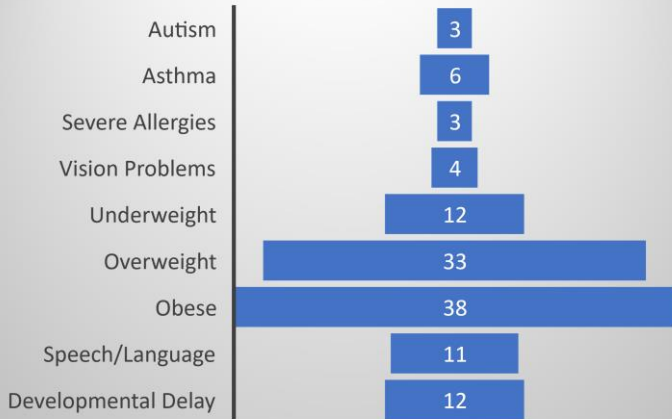
HEALTH SERVICES

Health Information at the End of the Program Year

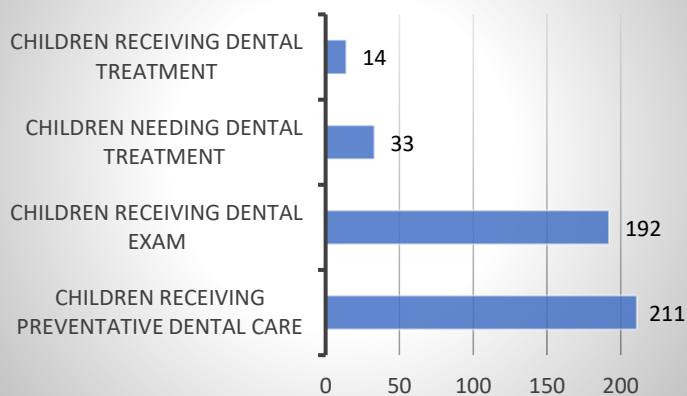
■ Up-to--Date Health
 ■ Health Insurance
 ■ Immunizations
 ■ Medical Home



Disability and Health Conditions



Dental Services



Our holistic approach to educating children is ensuring that they do not have physical constraints to learning. As a part of every school year, children receive comprehensive services attuned to the health and well-being of children enrolled in our program – including physical and dental examinations, developmental screenings, immunizations and access to affordable health, dental and vision care. Our Advocates work with families to ensure children receive necessary screenings, assessment, and treatment as necessary. In addition, through collaboration with community partners, including pediatricians, health departments, mental health providers and local education associations, we can provide health and disability services to children who experience chronic conditions or special accommodations as noted in an individual education plan.

PARTNERSHIPS

It would be impossible to serve our communities without dedicated collaborations with our partners. We are indebted to them for assisting us in meeting our vision for a holistic approach to education to children and families. We are truly grateful to the following organizations:

 <p>Moore Community House</p>	 <p>Shine Early Learning</p>	 <p>Gulfport Public Schools</p>
 <p>Harrison County Schools</p>	 <p>Oasis Mental Wellness</p>	 <p>Biloxi Public Schools</p>
 <p>Premier Professional Counseling</p>	 <p>MS Gulf Coast Community College</p>	 <p>Fordham University</p>
 <p>The Vision Center</p>	 <p>Feeding American – Gulf Coast</p>	 <p>University of Southern Mississippi</p>
 <p>Southern MS Planning & Development</p>	 <p>South Mississippi Smiles</p>	 <p>Coastal Family Health</p>



EXTENSION



HEAD START

MSU Extension Head Start-Early Head Start Programs

Striving to promote optimal development of each child and his/her family through positive learning experiences and high-quality service.

