



Discovery Station Early Head Start Community Assessment Update

Program Year 2017-2018

2017-18 Community Assessment Update

Family Services Early Head Start (EHS) produced a full *Community Assessment Report for 2015-16* based on census data, program surveys, and relevant research reports. This update is an amendment to the full report and provides new information that should be considered as EHS seeks to meet community needs and maximize partnerships in the 2017-18 program year.

Documents reviewed for this update included *Readiness Matters: Maryland and Montgomery County School Readiness Data (MSDE, 2017)*; *Montgomery County Early Care and Education Strategic Plan 2017 (MCDHHS, 2017)*; *The Self Sufficiency Standard for Maryland (Maryland Community Action Partnership 2016)*; *Early Care and Education Trends and Key Factors (Montgomery Moving Forward, November 2016)*; *Revised Head Start Program Performance Standards (Office of Head Start 2016)*; *DRAFT 2017 Community Assessment Report for Montgomery County Head Start (Montgomery County Community Action, February 2017)*.

The Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education in Montgomery County (MCDHSS 2017) was recently released. It was developed with input from the early childhood community including the Commission on Child Care, the Early Care Coordinating Council, and the Organization of Child Care Directors—all of which EHS is involved with. The plan documents the population trends and school readiness concerns noted in the *Community Assessment Report for 2015-16*. The county is experiencing increased diversity and significant needs among young families. There are growing numbers of families with low-income; those who speak English as a Second Language; those who have children with disabilities; and minority groups whose children are at risk of coming to school lacking school readiness skills.

The strategic plan calls for the development of a system of early care and education to meet the needs of all the County's children with the following five goals:

1. All infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Montgomery County experience high quality early care and education in formal and informal settings.
2. Montgomery County provides adequate resources to ensure eligible families can afford early care and education that is high-quality, accessible, and meets their needs.
3. The Montgomery County early childhood workforce is diverse, professionalized, well-compensated, and has access to ongoing professional learning supports.
4. All infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Montgomery County experience continuity in transitions as children develop and continuity across settings and sectors.
5. Montgomery County has the necessary infrastructure and funding to support a high-quality, affordable accessible early care and education system.

Child Care Needs: Montgomery Moving Forward (MMF), a cross-sector group of leaders committed to find innovative solutions to critical issues for the community has identified early care and education as the key issue for its collective action this year. Their *Early Care and Education Trends and Key Factors* (November 2016) reflect the data reported in our 2015-16 Community Assessment, highlighting a tremendous strain on families and employers resulting from a lack of affordable quality child care options. In a recent EHS family survey, half of the 111 families now receiving home based services indicated they are interested in finding child care for their infants and toddlers so they can work. Additional challenges families face due to the gap in services for 3 year old children were underscored in this survey.

Child Care Subsidies Update: Last year, Montgomery County revised their local child care subsidies program to provide higher reimbursement for child care and include families with higher level incomes, reflecting the cost of living in the community. Although additional funds were included in the budget, it was not sufficient to meet the demand. As a result, this year the program has gone from being underutilized to having a long waiting list of over 400 eligible children who are not being served.

Self Sufficiency Report: According to the 2016 Montgomery County Self Sufficiency Standard, for a family of four with two working parents, a preschooler and school-age child, families need to be at 450% of the Federal Poverty Level to pay for basic living costs including housing, food, child care and transportation. The previous report in 2012 indicated the same family would need

to be at 400% of the Federal Poverty Level, so the gap is widening for low income families to be able to afford to live in the County.

Immigration Policies: Montgomery County Police have a policy directive not to ask for information on the status of immigrants who report a crime or need assistance. However, the deportation fears noted in the report for 2015-16 have increased with proposed changes to immigration policies proposed at the federal level. Residents fear increased deportations, building a wall on the border with Mexico and immigration bans from predominantly Muslim countries. Despite the County's efforts to reassure the community, which have included holding solidarity rallies and information sessions, enrolled families are extremely fearful and families have become more isolated. In addition, families report more difficulty in accessing services such as ESOL classes and health clinics.

New Head Start Program Performance Standards: EHS is systematically addressing new program standards and as needed, seeking resources to support full implementation. For the first time, the expectations for home visiting programs were fully laid out and it is clear that the workload for home visitors has greatly increased, requiring a different staffing pattern. In addition, the new requirement to obtain evidence based hearing and vision screenings for all children in the program comes with a cost. With the combined estimated cost to purchase the screening tools approximately \$11,000, new partnerships to support and fund screening in the community will be needed.

Conclusion

Strategic Opportunities

The population that Discovery Station EHS serves continues to face challenges in accessing quality early childhood programs, especially for 3 year olds. At the same time, Montgomery County is engaging in multiple efforts to involve all stakeholders and policymakers in addressing key early care and education issues. This effort provides new opportunities for EHS to:

- Advocate for increased opportunities for 3 year olds in the implementation of the County's strategic plan.
- Strengthen transition agreements with Head Start and other early childhood programs.
- Participate in the Montgomery Moving Forward collective action process to demonstrate the positive impact of comprehensive supports and quality child care for vulnerable infants and toddlers.
- Share data and empower families to share their stories directly with policymakers.

Addressing Immigration Concerns

Of particular concern this year, is heightened immigration concerns that impact many enrolled families. These fears must be addressed effectively to support family well-being, a foundation for healthy child development and learning. EHS will need to partner with immigration experts. It will also need to ensure that staff is competent and well supported to address these sensitive issues effectively both through home visiting and in the center. In addition, more opportunities to bring isolated families together and connect them with peers and the community will be needed in the coming year.

Meeting New Standards

New Head Start Program Performance Standards led the program to consider reducing enrollment to ensure that home visitors are able to meet expectations for direct services, child observations and case documentation; as well as to promote family engagement through more direct involvement in parent programming. The program also struggles with staff retention and we need to ensure that staff expectations are realistic and achievable on a weekly basis.

The new standards provide new partner opportunities that should be explored. For example, several Health Advisory partners have indicated an interest in pooling resources to support increased developmental screenings at EHS and in other early childhood programs, as well. EHS will follow up to ensure the purchase of the required hearing and vision screening instruments to fully implement the new HSPPS for developmental screenings.

The new Performance Standards require an assessment as to whether children who are from diverse economic backgrounds and supported by other funding sources, including private pay, could be served in addition to the funded enrollment. We will explore options, but at the present time stable funding is not available to cover teachers and classroom expenses.

In the future, we hope that recommendations in the newly released *Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education in Montgomery County* will be funded. In the coming year, EHS will focus on building its capacity to provide services for diverse families, helping families apply for subsidy and meeting the Maryland State Department of Education Accreditation Standards required for Pre-K contracts.



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