



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

Office of Head Start | 4th Floor – Switzer Memorial Building, 330 C Street SW, Washington DC 20024 [eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov)

## Program Performance Summary Report

**To: Authorizing Official/Board Chairperson**

*Mrs. Carolyn Rentenbach*

*Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Inc.*

*3963 3 Mile Rd N*

*Traverse City, MI 49686 - 9164*

**From: Responsible HHS Official**

**Date: 05/28/2021**

**On behalf of Dr. Bernadine Futrell**

**Director, Office of Head Start**

From April 19, 2021 to April 22, 2021, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted a Focus Area One (FA1) monitoring review of the Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Inc. 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. The FA1 review allows the OHS to understand how programs are progressing in providing services in the 5-year grant cycle. The report includes the performance measures used to understand grantee progress towards program goals. You can use this report to identify where your program was able to describe progress toward implementing program services that promote quality outcomes for children and families. 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**

Ms. Karen McNamara, Regional Program Manager

Ms. Kerry Baughman, Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director

Ms. Shannon Phelps, Head Start Director

Ms. Shannon Phelps, Early Head Start Director

## Glossary of Terms

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| <b>Opportunity for Continuous Improvement (OCI)</b> | 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.   |
| <b>Area of Concern (AOC)</b>                        | An area for which the agency needs to improve performance. These issues should be discussed with the grantee's Regional Office of Head Start for possible technical assistance.   |
| <b>Area of Noncompliance (ANC)</b>                  | An area for which the agency is out of compliance with Federal requirements (including but not limited to the Head Start Act or one or more of the regulations) in one or more areas of performance. This status requires a written timeline of correction and possible technical assistance or guidance from the grantee's program specialist. If not corrected within the specified timeline, this status becomes a deficiency.   |
| <b>Deficiency</b>                                   | <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"> <li>(i) a threat to the health, safety, or civil rights of children or staff;</li> <li>(ii) a denial to parents of the exercise of their full roles and responsibilities related to program operations;</li> <li>(iii) a failure to comply with standards related to early childhood development and health services, family and community partnerships, or program design and management;</li> <li>(iv) the misuse of funds received under this subchapter;</li> <li>(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</li> <li>(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;</li> </ul> <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 Design, Management, and Quality Improvement

### Program Design

The grantee's program design and structure takes into account community strengths and needs.

### Program Management and Quality Improvement

The grantee has an approach for providing effective management and oversight of all program areas and fiduciary responsibilities.

### Program Governance

The grantee maintains a formal structure for program governance that includes a governing body, a policy council (or policy committee for delegates), and parent committees.

## Program Design, Management, and Quality Improvement Summary

Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Inc. provided Head Start and Early Head Start services in ten counties within Grand Traverse Bay, Lake Michigan. Head Start and Early Head Start services were designed to promote family self-sufficiency and children's school success through community collaborations. Program options included center-based direct services, school system and child care center collaboration classrooms, as well as Early Head Start home-based services. This service model offered parents enrollment options responsive to their family needs. Program leadership and the governing bodies analyzed community data, program data, and community partners' input to establish goals and improve program services. Staff reviewed program, child outcomes, health, and family contacts data monthly and used the information to determine opportunities for quality improvement. Data reports were also prepared and presented to the Board of Directors and the policy council each month to engage members in the ongoing monitoring process.

The tripartite Board of Directors comprised representation from each of its ten constituent counties and included members from governance, low-income clientele, and the community. The policy council featured members representing all ten counties and each program option. Additionally, the agency implemented an initiative entitled the "Cornerstones of Culture," which guided interactions with governing bodies, co-workers, community partners, children, and families. This initiative established expectations for nurturing, mindful, compassionate, and accountable actions and interactions that promoted positive outcomes for all program activities. Program leadership attributed the overall well-being and open communication among staff and families to this initiative. The program further built trusting relationships with staff, the Board of Directors, and the policy council, which encouraged a sense of confidence and autonomy in decision-making when discussing processes, procedures, and situations. Through data analysis, collaboration, continuous communication, and shared governance, the program established working relationships ensuring healthy children and families that moved toward self-sufficiency.



## Designing Quality Education and Child Development Program Services

### Alignment with School Readiness

The grantee's approach to school readiness aligns 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 has strategies to ensure teaching practices promote progress toward school readiness.

### Supporting Teachers in Promoting School Readiness

The grantee has an approach for ensuring teachers are prepared to implement the curriculum and support children's progress toward school readiness.

### Home-based Program Services

The grantee has strategies to ensure home-based program services help parents to provide high-quality learning experiences.

## Designing Quality Education and Child Development Program Services Summary

Teachers at Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Inc. applied the grantee's Cornerstones of Culture initiative in all classroom interactions and communication with parents. The initiative stressed nurturing, mindful, compassionate, accountable, and appreciative interactions that promoted a culture of support, empowerment, and collaboration. This ensured learning experiences fostered rich communication and language, advanced critical thinking, and the engagement of both children and their parents. The program offered classrooms directly operated by its staff, collaboration classrooms in school systems with specialized services for children with disabilities, classrooms in child care centers with expanded before and after school care, and home-based groups for Early Head Start children and pregnant mothers.

During the pandemic, virtual learning allowed the continuation of services wherein parents took a more significant role in planning and conducting lessons, observing children, and reporting child progress. The Creative Curriculum and the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment helped staff plan individual and group interactions, promoting school readiness for center-based children. The Parents as Teachers curriculum guided home visitors and parents to plan and design learning activities using materials in the home. Both teachers and home visitors supported parents in their role as their child's first and lifelong educator by serving as coaches and partners in the learning and development process. The program implemented Cornerstones of Culture strategies, used research-based curricula, and engaged parents to promote children's school readiness.



## Designing Quality Health Program Services

### Child Health Status and Care

The grantee has an approach for ensuring the delivery of high-quality health services.

### Safety Practices

The grantee implements a process for monitoring and maintaining healthy and safe environments and ensuring all staff have complete background checks.

## Designing Quality Health Program Services Highlight

Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Inc. ensured the delivery of quality health and safety services through data analysis and collaborations with parents and community partners. The program promoted good health practices supporting school readiness from the first contact with parents. Parents left the enrollment interview with information on the connections between good health and school readiness, how vision and hearing affect school performance, and maintaining good health habits. Staff assisted parents in obtaining insurance and making medical and dental examination appointments, and performed vision, hearing, and growth assessments screenings. Working partnerships with medical, dental, and mental health providers and their staff benefitted families with needs beyond the in-house services. For instance, a telephone call to partner providers from the team resulted in families receiving priority treatment for needed services. The Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) comprised health professionals, staff, and parents and met at least twice yearly (with a recommendation to increase to quarterly) and supported the program's delivery of health services. HSAC members participated in subcommittees focused on nutrition, disabilities, oral health, mental health, substance abuse, physical health, and safety.

A review of trending program data demonstrated increased mental health challenges associated with the COVID-19 crisis. After digging deeper into the data, the HSAC identified a correlation between family mental health needs and negative behaviors exhibited by the children. To understand the root of the issues, the HSAC studied postpartum depression, mood disorders, and substance misuse. Families experiencing these challenges were invited to a committee meeting, which allowed them to share their stories and facilitated responsive decision-making. The program also contracted with mental health professionals who completed classroom observations and provided feedback to parents and teachers with strategies to address concerns. Services provided on site or in a clinical setting included play, art, and trauma-informed therapy. Through the combined efforts of the staff, families, and mental health consultant, the team identified concerns, developed a service plan, and connected the family with the support that best fit their needs. The collaborative work of staff, parents, and community partners resulted in data-responsive planning to meet children's health needs.



## Designing Quality Family and Community Engagement Services

### Family Well-being

The grantee has an approach for collaborating with families to support family well-being.

### Strengthening Parenting and Parent-Child Supports

The grantee has an approach for providing services that strengthen parenting skills.

## Designing Quality Family and Community Engagement Services Summary

Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Inc.'s family engagement practices included regular communication with families, community partnerships, and monitoring family goals. The program developed relationships with families from the moment they applied with the program. The staff began by discussing family necessities and resources available to help meet them. Family service staff provided handouts to all families highlighting suggested resources to meet immediate needs through internal and external resources. A chart provided to all applicants identified the grantee's Head Start and Early Head Start program options and accompanying supports, such as transportation. This allowed parents to choose services aligned with their needs. A resource guide identified all community partners and service providers in each of the ten counties. Staff modeled the agency's Cornerstones of Culture program to build rapport with families, identify immediate needs, discuss long-term aspirations, and develop family goals. Staff constructed a partnership with parents using the Family Outcomes Tool, a form split into tasks the parents could do, and tasks the staff could do to support them. The checklist shifted data gathering to a conversation model to emphasize a supportive relationship between the family and staff. Staff assisted parents in accessing internal and community resources by making initial introductions and remaining involved as needed. Staff members later followed up with families and the community resource provider to evaluate progress and offer additional support. Community resource providers joined the team approach to serving family needs through collaborative practices, frequent communication, and celebrating successes.



## **Developing Effective Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) Strategies and Fiscal Infrastructure**

### **Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance**

At least 10% 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 full enrollment.

### **Fiscal Infrastructure, Capacity, and Responsiveness**

The grantee's fiscal staff have the qualifications needed to provide oversight of the grant.

The grantee has a budget development and revision process that includes stakeholders and appropriate approvals, and ensures continuous alignment with program design, goals, and objectives.

## **Developing Effective Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) Strategies and Fiscal Infrastructure Summary**

Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Inc. processed enrollment applications for all program options within its ten-county service area and prioritized families in need. Application forms on the agency website offered easy access and a convenient location to submit electronic eligibility documents. In interviews conducted in-person, virtually, or by phone, five recruitment and health specialists met with families to review records and verify age and income eligibility. The ChildPlus database housed documents collected for verification. The program further confirmed statements of homelessness, foster care, or public assistance status with the school's homelessness liaison or the issuing agency. Statements of zero income required a third-party statement from anyone providing support to the family. The ERSEA and health manager further validated decisions of eligibility based on calculations of income, documentation of categorical eligibility, and zero income statements. The waitlist was based on the selection criteria and could be sorted by location or the parent's preferred program option. The ERSEA and health manager maintained a dashboard to manage over-income applicants. At the time of application, the needs and strengths of the family were discussed, referrals were made to address family needs, and information was provided for alternate programs to consider until an opening became available for the family. All staff verifying eligibility for enrollment received annual refresher training to ensure accuracy of the process. Enrollment options were based on the location of the family, needs of the child, and availability of enrollment slots in the ten-county service area.

Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Inc. managed multiple funding streams from Federal, state, local, and foundation sources. Head Start funding comprised 50 percent of the agency's annual budget. The agency's chief financial officer, whose official title is financial comptroller, used the Abila MIP Fund Accounting software with 190 funding codes to manage each program's finances. The position of financial comptroller was in transition due to an upcoming retirement. A qualified person was found to fill the position and provided with training to learn the agency's fiscal systems. The newly hired financial comptroller had a master's degree in business administration and planned to transition into the position on June 10, 2021. The finance department staff included a department accountant with a bachelor's degree in accounting and an accounting manager with an associate degree. Detailed financial reports prepared monthly for the Board of Directors included each program account operated by the agency. Financial statements prepared for the policy council outlined expenditures for Head Start and Early Head Start programs, demonstrating budget versus actual expenses with account balances in each cost category. Development of the annual program budget considered past program data and projections for the upcoming year. The variety of program options, including collaborative programs and home-based services, had different operating costs monitored through the financial office. The policy council conducted budget planning discussions resulting in informed decisions when reviewing and approving proposed Head Start budgets before final approval by the Board of Directors. The grantee's fiscal structure contributed to quality programming for children and families.

----- End of Report -----