

Maine's Head Start & Early Head Start Snapshot Report

2021

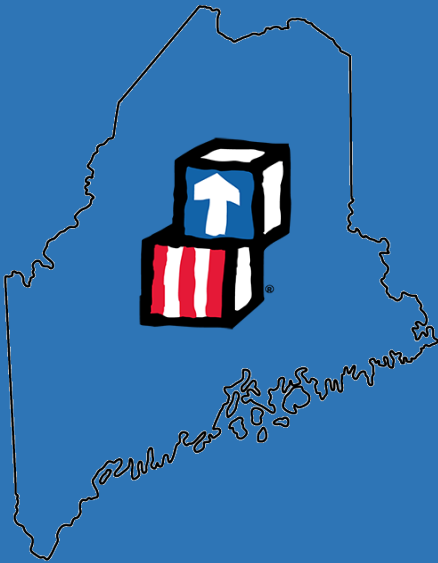
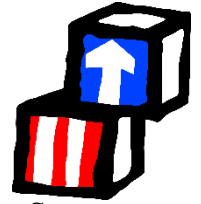


Photo courtesy of Community Concepts Inc.
@ Jay Early Learning Center



Dear Maine Community,

The Maine Head Start Directors' Association (MHSDA) and the Maine Head Start State Collaboration Office (MHSSCO) are pleased to share our Snapshot Report on Head Start and Early Head Start in Maine communities.

For over 55 years, Head Start has provided services to support the healthy development of Maine's most vulnerable children and their families. The model, developed in 1965 to provide preschool children with a "head start," is synonymous with a focus on school readiness. Informed by the known effects of poverty on child well-being, the comprehensive services program design provides equitable, diverse, and inclusive early education as well as health, nutrition, mental health, social and family support services. With the emergence of research on the importance of learning and development in the early years and the increased numbers of children and families living in poverty, Head Start is even more relevant today.

In Maine, there are eleven Head Start grantees that operate 24 programs, with over 240 classrooms and three Tribal Head Start grantees that serve 3 classrooms with a total of 60 children. The federal government provides 80% of the annual cost to operate Head Start programs with the remaining 20% coming from matching contributions. The State of Maine provides a small amount of funding allowing programs to serve additional children and families. The information presented in this report illustrates the unique features of the Head Start program, how the efforts are aligned and connected, and how Head Start programs support the broad goal of increased investment in high quality early care and education in Maine.

As an early care and education partner concerned with the healthy growth and development of Maine's citizens, Head Start continues to make vital contributions to the early care and education system in Maine. As Maine continues to build a comprehensive early childhood system, Head Start plays a critical role. Collaboration among early care and education programs is necessary to achieve greater access to high quality programs. Although there is no single agency that can meet all the diverse needs affecting low-income families, Head Start has a long and successful history in Maine of demonstrating effective outcomes for participating children and families. It is our hope that the Maine Head Start Snapshot Report will inform Maine citizens, practitioners, and decision makers in their ongoing efforts to promote high-quality early childhood programming.

Sincerely,

Cristina Salois, Director
Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation
Chair, Maine Head Start Directors' Association

Nena Cunningham Ed.D., Director
Head Start State Collaboration Office
Maine Department of Education

Head Start Matters

What is Head Start?

“Head Start is designed to ensure that all children - regardless of their family’s income, race, or ethnic background - are able to enter kindergarten ready to learn”

~ Lucille Roybal-Allard

When Head Start was first launched in 1965, the idea of providing comprehensive health, nutrition, and education services to children in poverty was revolutionary, if not radical. The Head Start model, developed over the decades, has been built on evidence-based practices and is constantly adapting - using the best available science and teaching techniques to meet the needs of local communities. The Head Start program was designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. A key tenet of the program established that it be culturally responsive to the communities served, and that the communities have an investment in its success through the contribution of volunteer hours and other donations as nonfederal share.

Click on the links throughout the document to see more!

Link

In 1995, the first Early Head Start grants were provided to serve children ages from 0-3 years. Since that time, Head Start and Early Head Start programs continue to thrive and serve children and families throughout the country. See the [Head Start Timeline](#) to delve into key moments throughout Head Start’s history!

What are the components of a Head Start/Early Head Start program?

Head Start takes a *comprehensive approach* to meeting the needs of young children. There are four major components to Head Start:

- **Early Education:** Providing a variety of learning experiences to help children grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally; and early identification of learning differences.
- **Health/Nutrition:** Providing health services such as immunizations, dental, medical, mental health, nutritional services, and early identification of health problems.
- **Family & Community Engagement:** Engaging parents/families in the planning and implementation of activities. Parents serve on policy councils and committees that make administrative decisions; participate in classes and workshops on child development; and volunteer in the programs.
- **Social Services:** Providing outreach to families to determine what services they need and collaborating with community providers to assure access.



Pandemic Impact on Programs



Vaccination Requirements & Mask Mandates

2021 was a challenging year for everyone. As Maine’s Head Start programs entered into the second year of the global pandemic, they successfully implemented health and safety regulations. Despite the ongoing changes and regulations related to mask mandates and vaccination requirements, local Head Start programs continued to support staff, children and their families, and serve as resources in communities. They navigated local, state, and federal mandates, often wrestling with the near impossible task of competing or conflicting requirements.

Universal mask mandates were implemented in all program locations, including children ages 2 and up. Some parents voiced concerns about their young children being required to wear masks during the day, while other commended programs for assuring mask wearing was in place. Head Start programs are typically faced with differing view points from families. Parental voice significantly increased during the 2021 calendar year, as families and communities struggled with the ‘forever changing’ mandates.

New vaccination requirements were released by the Office of Head Start on Nov. 30, 2021 as the interim final rule was released. This required all staff, certain contractors, and volunteers to be vaccinated for COVID-19 by Jan. 31, 2022. Some programs struggled to maintain high quality staff, while others experienced challenges aligning requirements with those of partnering school administrative units. By the end of 2021, many Head Start programs had been successful in obtaining agreements from district partners to abide by federal mandates, including bus drivers. However, some Head Start programs have not been able to secure agreements and worry about the future of their partnerships.



“I have also felt very secure in knowing that if we need help with something for the kids, they will do everything they can to provide that. We really are so very grateful for this program!”

~ Parent @ Midcoast Maine Community

“The support we received from our teacher about how to be there for my son during the pandemic was invaluable. I had just lost my job due to the pandemic, but I knew the teachers were there to support me, especially the family Service Coordinator!”

~ Parent @ Kennebec Valley Community Action Program

“The teachers are very caring and will do everything they can for your child.”

~ Parent @ Downeast Community Partners



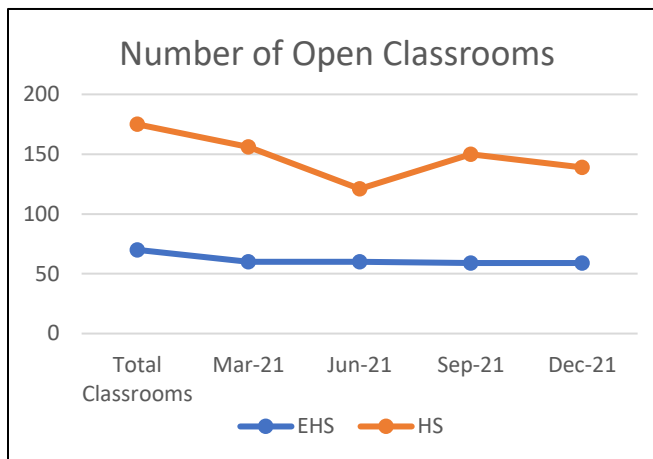


Classroom Closures Due to COVID-19

As COVID-19 numbers continued to fluctuate in communities, Head Start operated and effectively implemented protocols to ensure children and staff stayed safe and healthy. When programs were not able to provide in-person services due to classroom closures, they quickly shifted gears. Head Start programs ‘remained open’ to serve children and families through a variety of creative avenues, until in-person services could resume.



Some classrooms closed in-person services because of positive cases in partnership locations, while others closed due to staffing quarantines or isolation requirements. At the beginning of 2021, there were approximately 250 classrooms in Maine, including both Head Start and Early Head Start. In June 2021, the number of open classroom dropped significantly to 180 classrooms. However, this number reflects Part Day/Part Year PreK programming that mimics the Public School calendar, as does the rise in classrooms in September 2021.



“The [remote] learning helped my child feel connected to peers through this hard time. They helped with everything that our family has needed this past year. We are beyond grateful.”
~ Parent @ Kennebec Valley Community Action Program

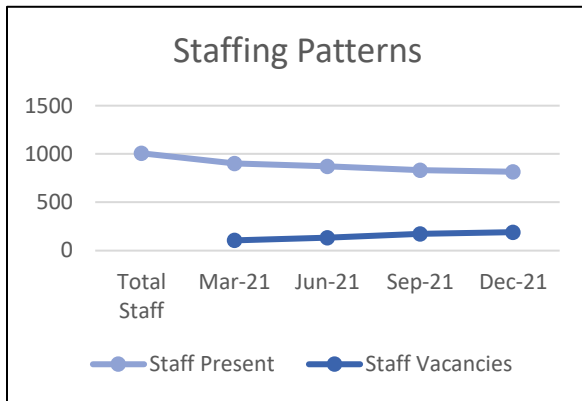


Regardless of the reason for closures, the number of classrooms that remained open for in-person services during the 2021 calendar year decreased overall. Programs worked tirelessly to provide remote services to children and their families whose classrooms temporarily closed.



Workforce Shortage & Challenges

The early childhood workforce shortage across all programs in Maine follows both the New England and national trends. Family childcare, center based childcare, private and public preschools have all identified workforce shortages as one of the major dilemmas. In addition to finding qualified staff and retaining them in programs has become a critical aspect of the shortage. Many programs are offering increased wages and additional benefits in hopes of maintaining their staff. This presents an additional challenge, as programs find themselves competing for staff and often trying to outbid community partners.



While programs across Maine continued to recruit high quality staff to fill vacant positions, they desperately worked to retain current staff members. Teachers, assistants, aides, and other support staff navigated program expectations while managing mask mandates and vaccination requirements. In 2021, a total of 276 staff left Head Start programs, 20.9% of total staff. Of these, 190 positions were successfully filled, leaving 86 vacant Head Start/Early Head Start positions across Maine.

Staff leave their positions for a variety of reasons, such as an increase in wages, better benefits, locations closer to their homes, and even personal or philosophical reasons. The Office of Head Start implemented a new COVID-19 vaccination mandate and provided resources and additional funding to assure program staff had access to vaccination sites, and were provided time to obtain vaccinations from medical providers. Very few staff made the decision to end their employment within Head Start because of the new mandate.

“I just want to commend the staff. In a world of complete chaos, you have maintained some normalcy for these children. Thank you!”
~ Parent @ Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation



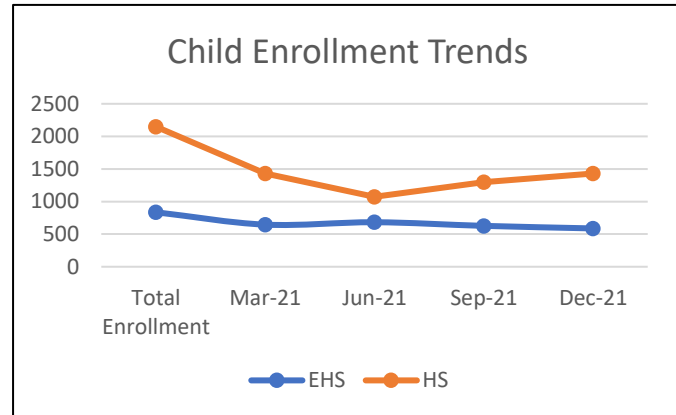
Data Trends



A Chance for Change... was the theme during 2021. Head Start programs across communities in Maine embraced the *chance* to create *changes* for improvement and to think innovatively about program design. They adapted to *changes* for a *chance* at some much needed normalcy. Lessons learned from 2021 served as a catalyst for this change.

Enrollment in programming fluctuated more in Head Start classrooms than in Early Head Start classrooms in 2021. Much like the classroom closures data, Head Start enrollment trends followed a similar pattern. Enrollment decreased in June 2021 and slowly increased through December 2021 (including Part Day/Part Year enrollment). Early Head Start enrollment followed the same trend as classroom closures for infants and toddlers.

Children who were enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start programming received comprehensive services, including additional support services provided by utilizing increased federal funding. Many children continued to demonstrate learning outcomes that were “at or above” developmental benchmarks, while others needed increased support. Programs were able to provide clinician supports, play therapy, transportation, mental health supports, and other family support services.



“I like the way the teachers take time to talk with me as a parent and explain where my child is at, the areas that I can work at home with him, and what he has been doing at school. I like that they value me as a parent and ask for my input to plan fun activities that my child comes home and shares with his father and I.”

~ Parent @ Aroostook Community Action Program

Many families identified an increased need for housing supports, health and medical resources, employment opportunities, and financial support. Head Start programs were able to make referrals and connect families with the services they desperately needed.

In 2021, there were over 190 families who experienced homelessness. Of these, 79 were able to acquire an adequate housing option for

their families, leaving 111 families still seeking adequate housing. Health and medical resources for families often includes obtaining health insurance, identifying a primary care provider, acquiring needed health treatments, participating in dental exams, and receiving immunizations. In 2021,

- 97.7% of enrolled children had health insurance: of these 90% of children had Medicaid and/or CHIP;
- 81.6% of enrolled children were determined to be up-to-date on all immunizations appropriate for their age (prior to immunization rule change); and
- 62.5% of enrolled children had accessible dental care provided by an oral health care professional which includes access to preventive care and dental treatment.



Grantee Service Regions

Aroostook County Action Program

County served: Aroostook
 P.O. Box 1116, 771 Main Street
 Presque Isle, ME 04769
 (O) 768-3045 (F) 768-3022
 Megan Barnes, Director
mbarnes@acap-me.org

DownEast Community Partners

Counties served: Hancock & Washington
 P.O. Box 648, Ellsworth, ME 04605
 (O) 610-5163
 (F) 667-2212
 Melissa Mattes, Director
Melissa.Mattes@DowneastCommunityPartners.org

Community Concepts, Inc.

Counties served: Oxford & Franklin
 17 Market Square, South Paris, ME 04281
 (O) 739-6516 (F) 739-6672
 Dianne Nelder, Director
DNelder@Community-Concepts.org

Kennebec Valley Community Action Program

Counties served: North Kennebec & Somerset
 97 Water Street, Waterville, ME 04901
 (O) 859-1616 (C) 514-6446
 Tracye Fortin, Child & Family Services Director
tracyef@kvcap.org

Midcoast Maine Community Action

Counties served: Sagadahoc, Lincoln & Greater Brunswick
 34 Wing Farm Parkway, Bath, ME 04530
 (O) 442-7963 ext. 214 (F) 443-7447
 Barbara Moody, Child & Family Services Director
barbara.moody@mmcacorp.org

The Opportunity Alliance

County served: Cumberland
 50 Lydia Lane, South Portland, ME 04106
 Debra Flynn, Director
 (O) 553-5917 (F) 874-1181
debra.flynn@opportunityalliance.org

Penquis Community Action Program

Counties served: Penobscot, Piscataquis & Knox
 P.O. Box 1162, Bangor, ME 04402
 (O) 973-3616
 (C) 745-2082 (F) 973-3699
 Mary Lynn Hersey, Director
MHersey@penquis.org

Promise Early Education Center

County served: Androscoggin
 269 Bates Street, Lewiston, ME 04240
 (O) 795-4040 ext. 316
 (C) 713-8445 (F) 795-4044
 Betsy Norcross Plourde, Director
bpourde@promiseearlyeducation.org

Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation

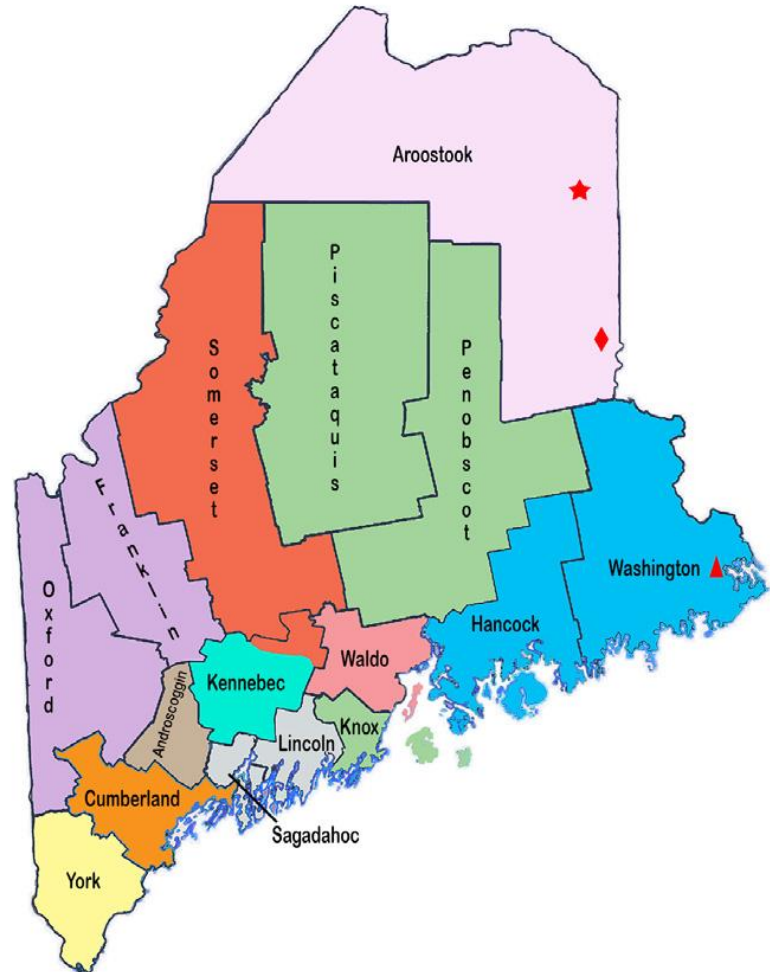
County served: Southern Kennebec
 337 Maine Avenue, Farmingdale, ME 04344
 (O) 582-3110 ext. 101
 (C) 462-9459 (F) 582-3112
 Cristina Salois, Director
cristina.salois@skcdc.org

Waldo County Community Action Partners

County served: Waldo
 P.O. Box 130, Belfast, ME 04915
 (O) 338-3827 ext. 203
 (C) 200-6474 (F) 338-4437
 Jamie Williams, Director
jwilliams@waldocap.org

York County Community Action Corporation

County served: York
 6 Spruce Street
 P.O. Box 72, Sanford, ME 04073
 (O) 459-2979 (F) 324-4197
 Cecily Silva, Director
cecily.silva@yccac.org



Tribal Programs

★ **Little Feathers Head Start Aroostook Band of Micmacs**
 Area served: Houlton and Presque Isle
 13 Northern Road, Presque Isle, ME 04769
 (207) 768-3217
 Tammy Deveau, Director
tdeveau@micmac-nsn.gov

◆ **Maliseet Head Start**
 Area served: Houlton
 1 Maliseet Drive, Houlton, Maine 04730
 (207) 521-2410
 Tracie Botting, Director
tbotting@maliseets.com

▲ **Passamaquoddy Head Start**
 Area served: Perry
 16 Day Care Road, Perry, ME 04667
 (207) 853-4388
 & (207) 454-2128
 Betty Lewey, Director
passamaquoddyheadstart@roadrunner.com

References

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** All photos were supplied by Head Start and Early Head Start programs throughout Maine*