



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

Program Performance Summary Report

To: Authorizing Official/Board Chairperson

Mr. Dwayne McFall
Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments
1718 Brookside Ave
Canon City, CO 81212 - 5165

From: Responsible HHS Official

Date: 04/13/2021

**On behalf of Dr. Bernadine Futrell
Director, Office of Head Start**

From March 1, 2021 to March 4, 2021, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted a Focus Area Two (FA2) monitoring review of the Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments Head Start program. 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:

Ms. Cheryl Lutz, Regional Program Manager
Mrs. Jessica Scott, Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director
Ms. Jo Beth Palmer, Head Start Director

Glossary of Terms

Opportunity for Continuous Improvement (OCI)	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.
Area of Concern (AOC)	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.
Area of Noncompliance (ANC)	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.
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 Summary

Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments leveraged its management team's experience and knowledge, used program data, and collaborated with the governing body to achieve program goals and maintain quality services. The program targeted areas for professional development and guided teaching practices based on data from Teaching Strategies GOLD child assessments and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores. When staff determined children's literacy scores did not meet widely held expectations, managers worked with the Board and the policy council to hire an education coach and purchased supplemental literacy resources and instructional materials for classrooms. Additionally, when self-assessment results identified the need for a more efficient data tracking system, the grantee purchased ChildPlus for use beginning July 2021. Although the program scored well in the CLASS Instructional Support Domain, recent scores were lower than desired. As a result, teacher professional development plans included a goal to improve the quality of teacher-child interactions. The management team also developed a COVID-19 response plan to promote continuity of services during the pandemic. The team jointly worked together with community partners to ensure families had the basic essentials for everyday living and the necessary technology and educational materials to facilitate virtual learning. The management team and Board analyzed data to determine the program's progress, assess risk, and plan for improvement.

The policy council members encouraged parents' active involvement in program operations and responded to community and parent needs. The policy council's structure allowed for direct communication and the ability to incorporate parents' suggestions within program planning. Council subcommittees were formed to focus on health and safety, education, and finance. One parent shared how serving on the health and safety committee included completing monthly safety checks of classrooms, common areas, and the playground. Another parent reflected on conducting classroom observations and monitoring lesson plans as part of their membership on the education committee. The policy council members explained each committee presented activity reports to the general membership. Program services were strengthened because of the policy council's active involvement, including the formation of subcommittees to oversee content areas.



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 Summary

Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments implemented The Creative Curriculum across all age groups and analyzed children's assessment data to prepare children for school. A school readiness action plan was developed to align educational practices with the expectations of receiving schools, the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF), and the Colorado Early Learning & Development Guidelines. The education/mental health manager created a school readiness action plan after each child assessment checkpoint and presented it to the management team for review and feedback. School district elementary principals and kindergarten teachers also provided input on the plan. At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, only 75 percent of the program's 4- and 5-year-olds met desired literacy expectations. In response, teachers participated in targeted professional development, and the program hired an education coach with expertise in literacy development. Families were encouraged to engage children in promoting literacy at home and were provided with additional activities to improve children's outcomes. Teachers were supported throughout these processes by management staff who used their expertise to help them manage classrooms and create positive learning environments. The Practiced-Based Coaching model was implemented to help teachers create behavior improvement plans for children, improve transitions between activities, and accurately implement the curriculum. During their interview, teachers expressed satisfaction with the quality of support received from the coach, the education manager, and other service area managers. The longevity, education, experience, and leadership of the management staff ensured teachers felt supported in their efforts to provide positive learning environments and effectively manage their classrooms. During COVID-19, the program offered virtual instruction for nine families, with all other children opting to attend in person. The Creative Curriculum's digital resources were beneficial during virtual learning, and staff suggested ideas for creating engaging learning environments while at home. The grantee's use of a research-based curriculum and data analyses to inform instructional practices contributed to high-quality educational services provided to children.

The program's educational services also included a process for promoting successful transitions to kindergarten. For instance, school district staff participated in the program's annual kindergarten transition event, and children visited a kindergarten classroom to meet teachers and participate in activities. Additionally, the program assembled a team, which included representatives from the school districts and the ECHO and Family Center Early Childhood Council, to attend the Region 8 Transition Summit. Inspired by the summit, the program partnered with school districts to form the Freemont Transition Team to develop community-wide transition policies. The program's collaboration with school districts supported successful transitions to kindergarten.



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

Not Applicable.

Monitoring and Implementing Quality Health Services Summary

Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments captured and tracked health services through collaborations and regular data monitoring. Program staff collected child health data at the time of enrollment and updated it throughout the year. Staff also referred families for insurance coverage, and to medical and dental homes as needed, to promote access to ongoing health services. The program used CAP60 to track child health data, and the health manager regularly monitored child health progress to ensure children's ongoing health care needs were met and promptly recorded. For example, a CAP60 report indicated 98 percent of children were up to date on immunizations before COVID-19. The program was planning to transition from CAP60 to ChildPlus, with full integration by July 2021. Managers explained the switch would better meet the program's data collection, tracking, and analysis needs. Mental health services were provided by the ECHO and Family Center Early Childhood Council mental health action team for children and families. The team consisted of community mental health providers, social workers, registered nurses, behavior specialists, and the program's education/mental health manager, who all worked together to determine the best approach to serving each child's needs. These efforts were reinforced by the education/mental health manager, who leveraged their own special education and behavior analysis background to promote children's healthy social-emotional development. Community partners combined with the health staff's expertise allowed for effective delivery of quality health services to children and families.

The program maintained safe and healthy environments through regular inspections and staff training. Teachers completed daily checklists of indoor and outdoor facilities and promptly reported any repair and maintenance needs to management. Additionally, the health manager completed weekly indoor and outdoor safety checklists, policy council members conducted a monthly safety check of each building, and the state health department and fire marshal ensured sites met regulatory standards. Ongoing monitoring also included visits to classrooms to observe child supervision practices, and accident and incident reports were analyzed for trends and patterns. Other health and safety practices included implementing active supervision, enforcing agency standards of conduct, and participation in annual and ongoing safety training. In addition, the program completed background checks on all staff before hire and every 5 years. To keep families and staff safe during the pandemic, Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments worked with the health department and local school systems to develop a COVID-19 response plan. Following recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the plan included steps for reopening classrooms and outlined enhanced sanitation procedures. For instance, sanitization procedures included using Environmental Protection Agency-approved products to clean busses, classrooms, and playgrounds. The program also installed plastic barriers in each classroom, mandated mask-wearing, and required social distancing. The program's responsive approaches to safety included routine inspections, staff training, and plans to minimize the spread of COVID-19.



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 Summary

Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments supported family goal setting and tracked family strengths, needs, and progress toward goals. Results from the family needs assessment informed the family partnership agreement process. The program used its software to capture and track family data, which family services staff analyzed to help them individualize support for families based on their needs. Family service staff included a manager and five family service workers, who reviewed family needs three times a year and connected them to local resources such as housing, financial assistance, food, clothing, and transportation services. Parents were encouraged to be active in their child's learning and development through a variety of ways, such as the Positive Solutions for Families parenting sessions and other program events. Teachers also partnered with parents to develop educational goals for children and boosted their confidence by encouraging participation in parent-teacher conferences and home visits with staff. During the pandemic, virtual activities and lessons were used to strengthen parenting skills. For example, parents learned to navigate technology and access online learning games so their children could participate in virtual learning. ReadyRosie provided opportunities for parents to view videos and guide their children through activities and experiences specifically selected by the teacher to match their child's developmental level. Parents shared they were supported in their child's learning by watching ReadyRosie demonstration videos created by the teacher. One parent reflected on watching teachers complete an activity which subsequently increased their own child development knowledge. When a parent was concerned about a child's behavior, the teacher referred the family to videos in ReadyRosie on positive discipline techniques. The program engaged parents in their children's education and supported them in strengthening parenting skills.



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 Summary

Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments' fiscal infrastructure was designed to protect federal funds and meet the program's financial needs. The program's fully integrated financial management accounting system met award requirements, and fiscal staff members were well qualified to support and oversee financial systems. The fiscal manager supervised three employees, including a deputy fiscal manager and two accounting analysts, who were responsible for reporting, accounts payable, procurement, and cash management. The Grants Management Accounting and Financial Management Reporting system was used to monitor the budget and inform the management team and governing body's decision-making, including their evaluation of the budget against program needs. In addition, the Head Start director and the financial officer ensured the policy council and the Board were aware of fiscal policies and received a monthly financial report. During a discussion, members stated financial reports were easy to read and understand, and the Head Start director and financial manager were available to answer questions as needed. The fiscal manager stated the program followed all applicable financial policies and procedures for accounting and distributing all grantee funds. Additionally, the Head Start director and the financial manager monitored the budget to ensure spending was reasonable, allocable, and beneficial to the program. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding was incorporated into the budget stream and used for COVID-19 safety measures and enhanced services delivery. The grantee used its internal policies and procedures to guide all fund allocations related to operations. The program's approach to fiscal practices provided effective oversight of Head Start and Early Head Start funding.



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 Summary

The grantee targeted categorically eligible children for enrollment and adapted selection criteria based on community needs. The management team, family services staff, the policy council, and the Board reinforced an effective ERSEA process by participating in annual training intended to promote integrity and accuracy. Children were prioritized for enrollment based on age, family income, entrance into foster or kinship care, disability diagnosis, homelessness, and public assistance participation. The Board and the policy council recently adjusted the selection criteria to assign higher points to families experiencing domestic violence and COVID-19 related challenges. The ERSEA manager completed an eligibility worksheet for each applicant, and children ineligible for Head Start services were referred to the Colorado Preschool Program. For those deemed eligible, the ERSEA manager reverified the documentation for accuracy and captured enrollment information, monitored attendance, and maintained a waitlist within the program's database. Children and families on the waitlist were ranked according to the program's selection criteria. Those who were regularly absent were removed from the program and replaced with a family on the waitlist. During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff modified the enrollment interview process to keep staff and families safe by adding an option to apply online and submit supporting documentation at the grantee's main office. When offering in-person appointments for parents who could not complete applications electronically, staff followed strict COVID-19 safety measures. The program prioritized the enrollment of categorically eligible children and promoted their regular attendance.

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