



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY™

EXTENSION

Head Start-Early Head Start

2021-2022

***Community Needs
Assessment***

Introduction and Purpose

This Community Assessment is in fulfillment of the requirements of Head Start Performance Standards (45 CFR 1302.11) which requires an assessment of the needs of the communities served every five years. The objective is to provide a snapshot of our service area and to identify characteristics which may have a significant impact on agency planning and program development. The Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations (45 CFR 1302.11 (b)) specify the information that must be included in the Community Assessment and submitted with the grant application. To summarize, the grantee agency is required to collect and analyze information in the Community Assessment about:

1. The number of eligible children 0-5, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages spoken, including:
 - a. Children experiencing homelessness;
 - b. Children in foster care; and
 - c. Children with disabilities, including types and relevant services/resources provided by community agencies;
2. The education, health, nutrition and social service needs of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being;
3. Typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children;
4. Other child development, childcare centers, and or family childcare programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of children served;
5. Resources that are available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families; and
6. Strengths of the community.

The community assessment provides the most recent data available regarding demographics, early learning programs, disabilities, health and nutrition, and social services for children and families in the region. The assessment provides a portrait of our programs and activities and identifies community resources available. This assessment also identifies where there are gaps between available services and needs.

The Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations (45 CFR 1302.102) state that the information gathered in the Community Assessment (CA) must guide decisions based on the status of eligible families and the community setting(s) within the service area. Specifically, they state that: The information in the Community Assessment will be used to:

1. Help determine the grantee's philosophy, and its long-range and short-range program objectives.
2. Determine the type of component services that are most needed and the program option or options that will be implemented.
3. Determine the recruitment area that will be served by the grantee, if limitations in the amount of resources make it impossible to serve the entire service area.
4. If there are delegate agencies, determine the recruitment area that will be served by the

grantee and the recruitment area that will be served by each delegate agency.

5. Determine appropriate locations for centers and the areas to be served by home based programs; and 6. Set criteria that define the types of children and families who will be given priority for recruitment and selection.

Ultimately, the community assessment is used to make decisions for outreach, enrollment, selection and the most appropriate delivery of Head Start services. It is a valuable resource for staff, parents and community partners to collectively think about the impacts of population shifts and equitable distribution of services.

Methodology

This assessment was developed from data and statistics collected from several national, state, and local resources including the most recent research from 2022 Kids Count, the 2019 US Census Bureau, and local program statistics. The majority of the program statistics are heavily impacted by reduced services due to the second year of COVID. As we continue to recover from the pandemic as a nation, we anticipate program statistics will return to more typical service statistics as limitations by Head Start, public health and Mississippi Regulated Child Care continue to be lifted. In addition, MSU-Extension Head Start just concluded its first year of operation, with all facilities open after a phased in approach. As health restrictions ease, our program will focus on facility acquisition and renovation to serve our full funded enrollment of 552 children.

Executive Summary

According to the Mississippi Department of Education, Mississippi is the last ranked state in all metrics of Child Well-Being with the exception of education where it held ranked 39th out of 50 states. Mississippi experienced a substantial gain from 2014 with a jump of 9 positions from 48th. Other metrics of child well-being include children who live in poverty, children whose parents lack secure employment and children who live in households with a high housing cost burden. The indicators for Health and Family and Community continue to be dire again with Mississippi ranking last in both categories. Health metrics include children without health insurance, children and teens who are overweight or obese and child and teen deaths. Family and Community statistics include children in high poverty areas, children in single-parent families and children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma. Mississippi is a state in crisis and Harrison County, although higher than state averages in many categories, suffers along with the rest of the state in these areas. In overall child well-being, Mississippi ranks next to last behind New Mexico. 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 their wealth and other resources. Policy choices and investments also influence children's chances for success.

This report includes demographic, economic and health data for Harrison County, and in most cases, a comparison with statewide statistics. Mississippi State University-Extension Head Start became a grantee in 2019, after reports that more than 70% of children served by Head Start were in programs that were identified as low-performing and subsequently forced to compete for their grants via the Designation Renewal System. In addition, Head Start children in the area consistently scored the lowest among all child care options in Kindergarten Entrance Assessments, with some Harrison County school districts reporting that Head Start children score lower than Head Start eligible children who had not been served. As the new grantee, MSU-Extension is committed to providing opportunities for children and families to experience positive outcomes to ensure future school success.

In 2021, no federal reviews have taken place, but a snapshot of our commitment is evidenced by our Focus Area One (FA1) monitoring review conducted by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) from May 4-8, 2020. The review consisted of interviewing content area and leadership staff, Board and Policy Council members as well as policy and procedure review. **We were found to be in good standing with no areas of concern, non-compliance or deficiency during our first year of operation.** The review team also identified several areas of strength, including the use of various program data to monitor compliance and staff performance to inform continuous improvement in all service areas; the leveraged support and expertise of board members in assisting with the implementation of the goals and objectives related to identifying community resources for parents and helping to improve children's transition to kindergarten. Through our efforts, and other committed early care and education professionals, we will change the narrative for our most vulnerable children and families in Mississippi.

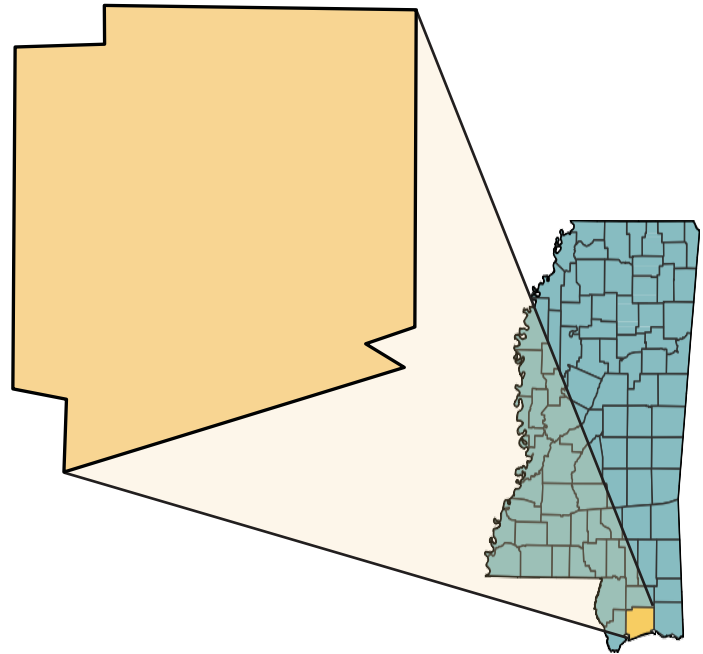
About Our Geographic area:

Harrison County is the largest county in Mississippi's coastal region, spanning more than 900 square miles, and is home to 204,502 residents (US Census Bureau), with 24% of this population including children under 18, according to Kid's Count (2022). The county, which is centrally located on the Gulf of Mexico, encompasses five distinct cities, including Biloxi, D'Iberville, Gulfport, Long Beach, and Pass Christian. In a state where one in five residents lives below the poverty line, it is actually among the wealthiest areas in the state.

Our organization has been a singular beacon for quality early childhood education in the state. Over the last decade, MSU-ES has been tasked with operating the Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network, administering the state's QRIS and providing a network of quality improvement

supports for early childhood providers, culminating in the \$15M/year Early Years Network grant. There is no meaningful ECE initiative in the state in which MSU-ES has not played a leadership role. We expanded our capacity into new territory by entering the Head Start/Early Head Start world on August 1, 2019 for Harrison County, Mississippi.

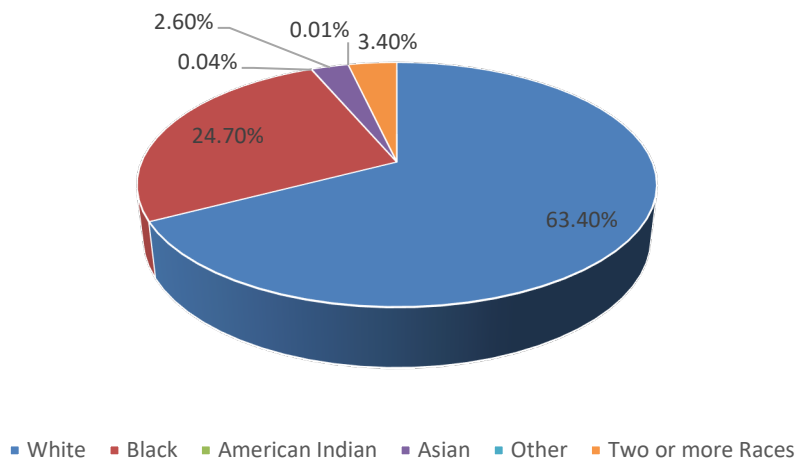
Few counties have a higher median and per capita income, and with a poverty rate of 17.5%, only 20 other counties fare better. However, there is a stark contrast for the children of Harrison County – with 28.1% below five who live in poverty, with a ranking of 36th out of 82 counties. Bolstered by the tourism industry that creates opportunities for working families in casinos alongside the restaurants and retail environments that surround them, residents of this community benefit from a diversified economy, demonstrated by one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state. As with many southern states, this area saw a significant increase in population post-Hurricane Katrina, complicating the need to rebuild, and adding to the strain on resources. Even though economic indicators are trending upward, the fact remains that 34% of children in Mississippi live in a household where parents lack secure employment. Many parents who want full-time work are forced to piece together part-time or temporary jobs that do not provide sufficient or stable income. In addition, some lack the education and skills needed to secure a good job.



Population Statistics:

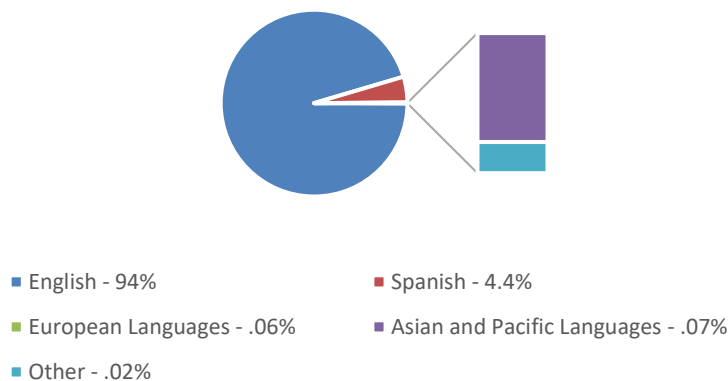
| | Harrison County | | Mississippi | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------------|-------|
| | Actual | % | Actual | % |
| Population | 204,502 | 6.8% | 2,988,762 | 100% |
| Male | 99,750 | 49.2% | 1,450,379 | 48% |
| Female | 102,876 | 50.8% | 1,538,383 | 51.5% |
| Children under 5 | 13,613 | 6.7% | 188,575 | 6.3% |

**Harrison County
Population by Race**



5.5% of Harrison County's population is Hispanic or Latino

Primary Language in the Home



94% of Harrison County residents speak only English, while only 6.82% speak other languages.

Economic Indicators:

| | Harrison County | Mississippi |
|---|-----------------|-------------|
| Median Income | \$48,547 | \$46,511 |
| Unemployment Rates (February 2022) | 4.3% | 4.4% |
| Children with no Parent in the Workforce | 11% | 11.9% |
| People Living in Poverty | 35,341 | 559,764 |
| % in Poverty | 17.5% | 19.5% |
| Children in Poverty | 9,899 | 132,900 |
| % Child Poverty | 28.1% | 26.4% |
| Children in Single Parent Families | 41.9% | 43.6% |
| Owner Occupied Housing | 56.48% | 68.17% |
| Renter Occupied Housing | 43.52% | 31.83% |
| Children in Care of Grandparents | 3,018 | 55,838 |

- Approximately 46% of all children live in a single parent household and 75% of all prospective Head Start and Early Head Start parents are single mothers.
- According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in 2019, 19% of families had little to no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment on time.
- Mississippi Kids Count estimates that over 85,000 (12%) children live in extreme poverty. For a family of 4, that would equate to \$13,086 per year. A significantly disproportionate amount of those children is black (56,000).
- In Mississippi, 4,007 children were in the foster care system and of that number 42% are under the age of 5.
- Up to 46% of households with children 0-4 in Mississippi reported that their childcare arrangements were disrupted because of the pandemic. As a result, 21% reported that they were forced to leave employment to care for their children, with up to 31% of families with children reporting loss on income – the largest loss reported in the first two weeks of January 2022.

Child Health and Social Service Metrics:

| | Harrison County | | Mississippi | |
|--|-----------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | Actual | % | Actual | % |
| Child Health Indicators | | | | |
| Low Birthweight Babies | 271 | 10.2% | 4,510 | 12.3% |
| Premature Births | 338 | 12.8% | 5,339 | 14.6% |
| Teen Pregnancy (rate per 1,000) | 194 | 31.1% | 3,320 | 33.7% |
| Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000) | 8.4 | | 8.8 | |
| Child Abuse and Neglect Reports | 3,290 | | 25,997 | |
| Child Abuse Substantiated | 602 | | 6,865 | |
| Children in Foster Care | 1,415 | | 8,547 | |
| Mothers without a High School Diploma | 309 | 11.7% | 4,565 | 12.4% |
| Food Insecurity | 39,200 | 19.2% | 550,370 | 18.5% |
| Food Insecurity (Children) | 10,690 | 21.7% | 155,560 | 22.3% |
| Temporary Assistance for Needy Families | \$483,936 | | \$6,034,744 | |
| Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program | \$62,094,669 | | \$850,148,588 | |

Other Health Factors:

- Harrison County again leads the state in the number of evidenced child victims of abuse and neglect with 602 substantiated cases. Out of the total reports, 82% were unique children subject to maltreatment.
- Mississippi Department of Child Protective Services (MDCPS) reports that only 68% of investigations were initiated withing a timely manner.
- Of the total number of victims on file with MDCPS, infants up to one year old are at the greatest risk, with 14% of the total cases. The next highest percentage for an age group is 6% (ages 1, 11, and 12). For children age eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start, the total percentage of cases is 34%, making birth to 5 the most at risk of child abuse. In addition, of the children under the age of 5 who were confirmed by child protective services as victims of maltreatment, the following is the breakdown of abuse:
 - 17% emotional abuse
 - 5% medical neglect

- 72% neglect
- 16% physical abuse
- 14% sexual abuse
- In 2020, Mississippi ranked last in percentage of households who at some point during the year experienced difficulty providing enough food due to lack of money or resources.
- Mississippi's teen birth rate was the highest in the United States.
- The state has the highest rate of premature death in the United States, many due to chronic conditions. In addition, Mississippi is also highest ranked in infant mortality with a large racial disparity – 6.8 deaths per 1,000 live births among white babies vs. 11.4 per 1,000 live births for black babies.
- Harrison County had the third highest number of suspected overdose deaths in 2020 with 49 and was ranked number 4 in the state in reported number of drug related arrests with 1,022.
- Seventy-three adults were reported hospitalized for substance use disorders.
- Adults reporting depressive disorders – 22%.
- Almost 27% of adults in Harrison County report being current smokers and 48% reporting alcohol use.
- As of April 2022, Harrison County had 663 deaths from COVID-19, with 53,577 total cases.
- Harrison County ranks above the state and national averages in self-harm and interpersonal violence mortality.

Disability Information:

In Harrison County, there are 250 children, birth to three, receiving Early Intervention services. Early Head Start has five children who have an IFSP (Individual Family Service Plan) and one child with an IFSP. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, there are 1,001 (16.6% of enrollment) children statewide who are receiving special education services. During FY 2022, a total of 4,082 children, about 4% of Mississippi's children under the age of three, are receiving First Steps services. According to the Census, there are 13,546 children under five with a diagnosed disability.

Head Start Eligible Children and Families

According to Mississippi Kids Count, less than 50% of age eligible children are enrolled in preschool or nursery school in Harrison County, below the state average of 53.2%. Of the number not in school, the estimate is that 49% of the children not in care fall below 200% of the poverty level. Using census data, we applied the child poverty rate in Harrison County to the age-eligible population of children to estimate there are 2,875 income-eligible EHS infants and toddlers and 1,812 income-eligible preschool aged Head Start children in our service area. By applying the birth rate to the ratio of low-income women, we estimate that at least 320 income eligible pregnantwomen live in Harrison County.

Eligibility by zip code/age:

| | < 1 yr | 1 yr | 2 yrs | 3 yrs | 4 yrs |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| 39501 (<i>Gulfport</i>) | 225 | 216 | 231 | 213 | 188 |
| 39503 (<i>Gulfport</i>) | 213 | 229 | 225 | 202 | 229 |
| 39507 (<i>Gulfport</i>) | 67 | 57 | 68 | 65 | 59 |
| 39530 (<i>Biloxi</i>) | 75 | 83 | 78 | 80 | 77 |
| 39531 (<i>Biloxi</i>) | 145 | 137 | 139 | 137 | 128 |
| 39532 (<i>Biloxi</i>) | 131 | 135 | 133 | 127 | 117 |
| 39540 (<i>D'Iberville</i>) | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| 39571 (<i>Cuevas</i>) | 54 | 50 | 54 | 50 | 50 |
| 39574 (<i>Airey</i>) | 37 | 37 | 41 | 43 | 37 |
| Total (<i>By Age</i>) | 951 | 950 | 975 | 920 | 892 |
| Total (<i>By Program</i>) | EHS | 2,875 | | HS | 1,812 |

Head Start/Early Head Start Services Snapshot 2020-2021

There are 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 4 pre-K classrooms; 1 classroom each that are housed at 4 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 2020-2021 school year, our program served a total of 234 children in Head Start as well as 60 children and 6 pregnant women in Early Head Start. Of the enrolled participants, there were 260 children and pregnant women that were non-Hispanic while 40 were Hispanic. There are a variety of primary languages spoken among the children.

- 270 spoke English,
- 22 were Spanish speaking, and
- 2 spoke Vietnamese.

There were 181 children served by our program that were income eligible. The number of families served by the program that are over income >130% is 34; and 24 children are over income of 101%-130%. Twenty-six children benefit from public assistance. There are 7 foster children and 28 homeless children (12 in Head Start and 16 in Early Head Start) that have been served by our program this past school year.

Twenty-three children had an active IEP:

- 13 who are diagnosed with a speech or language disturbance,
- 9 who have a non-categorical/developmental delay,
- 1 other who has an emotional disturbance.

Currently, all children with IEPs are serviced through our active partnership with our Local Education Agency (LEA). In Early Head Start, four children were determined eligible to receive early intervention services under IDEA which resulted in the creation of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

The following chart shows the breakdown of how many children and families were served by center, as well as the number and percentage of children who had physical and dental exams.

| Location | Children Served | Families Served | Physical Exams | % | Dental Exams | % |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| East Biloxi Elementary | 64 | 62 | 58 | 90% | 59 | 92% |
| Gaston Point | 49 | 47 | 32 | 65% | 39 | 80% |
| Dr. Gilbert Mason | 54 | 52 | 50 | 93% | 53 | 98% |
| Gulfport Partnership | 67 | 66 | 50 | 75% | 53 | 79% |
| Total Head Start | 234 | 227 | 190 | 81% | 204 | 87% |
| Linda Lyons (EHS) | 66 | 49 | 53 | 80% | 49 | 74% |

Access to other early childhood education programs

Parents in Harrison County have limited access to affordable childcare and no simple system that organizes the accountability of caregivers. Between Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care Payment Program (CCPP), and public pre-k, public assistance programs in the state meet some low-income parents' needs. The CCPP, which is funded through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), serves children in households earning up to 85% of the state median income and, of course, Head Start income eligibility relies on poverty status. In 2020, just over 48% of children were enrolled in preschool or nursery programs, which is under the state average of almost 52%. Of the 76 licensed childcare facilities in Harrison County, 38 have capabilities to care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and 16 have provisions for toddlers and preschool only. Together with CCDF and public schools, only about 1,000 children under five are being served in Harrison County, a fraction of those eligible. Including Head Start, 35% of all three- and four- year-old in Harrison County were enrolled in school in 2020. Unsurprisingly, some of the areas with the lowest enrollment overlap areas of highest economic need.

Head Start Staff

Our community is forever changed as we seemingly come to an end of the pandemic. Organizations have learned to work differently than previously thought possible with the increased opportunities in a work from home environment. These changes have left us in an uncomfortable position of adjusting to increasing challenges in the hiring and retention of staff. With record numbers of staff across the nation voluntarily leaving their jobs, we are no different. In the past year, we had 5 Early Head Start teachers leave and 36 Head Start staff – 24 of whom were education staff. For the 36 staff who left, only 13 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. Many have left for work in similar fields, such as local school systems, but a significant number have left to start small businesses or work remotely from home offices. Because this is a nationwide crisis, competitors have sprung up in unexpected places such as Target or Starbucks who are not only offering higher starting salaries but are also offering new employees signing and retention bonuses.

Out of 26 Head Start classroom teachers, a vast majority are highly educated with a bachelor's degree or higher in their field or related area of Early Childhood Education (65%), with another 35% holding an associate degree in Early Childhood or related field. For Early Head Start, nearly half of the classroom teachers have an associate degree or higher, with seven additional EHS staff holding a Child Development Associate in infant/toddler development. Two EHS staff are currently enrolled in CDA classes to obtain the proper credentialing. With the stringent staffing standards required by Head Start, entry level staff are difficult to find and can be even harder to keep. Working in early care and education is difficult with notoriously low wages. During the pandemic, staff experienced difficulties due to the need to change their entire approach to teaching and family engagement while also dealing with the effects of the chaos personally. Those with children were responsible for non-traditional virtual instruction or hybrid classrooms while balancing life with family at home, or isolation from a larger network of support. In many cases the pressures of work and family life were too difficult to maintain, leading them to make the choice to leave the organization for a higher paying and less regulated job field. Even with increases in funding through CARES and ARPA, those temporary measures are not sustainable. As an organization, we must find new ways to recruit, train and retain highly qualified staff.