
2020 HEAD START COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT SUMMARY



Head Start and
Early Head Start
Fairfax County Office for Children



Introduction

The Fairfax County Office for Children Head Start and Early Head Start Program provides early care and education and comprehensive family services to income eligible families in Early Head Start - which serves infants, toddlers and expectant parents - and Head Start which serves children ages three to five.

The federal Head Start and Early Head Start grants are awarded to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Fairfax County Public Schools and Higher Horizons are delegates that manage and operate programs. Fairfax County operates Greater Mt. Vernon Community Head Start and Early Head Start and Family Child Care. Services are provided in families' homes, family child care provider homes and in classrooms.

Head Start services include education, health, parent engagement and social services. The promotion of school readiness is the primary focus for all children enrolled in the program. Services are designed to meet the needs of the children and families within the cultural context of their family, school and community. This cultural context is an important factor in the development of critical life skills vital to children's readiness for kindergarten, success in school and life-long well-being.

To meet the goals of the program service areas, as established by the federal government, Head Start Program Performance Standards and the Head Start Act outline the programmatic requirements which all Head Start Programs must meet.



Analysis/How the Community Assessment Is Used

Data from the annual Program Information Report (PIR) and other program data was examined to identify trends in needs, strengths and challenges families are facing. Data indicators are used to identify priority areas for future program planning. In addition, national, state and local agencies' publications and reports were examined, and information analyzed for trends that are important for future Head Start and early care and education planning (see references).

Fairfax County Head Start will use the community assessment to guide program operations and improvement. Specifically, the team will use the community assessment to:

- Understand locations and demographics of eligible families
- Assess new or underserved opportunities in the service area
- Determine newly identified community assets or resources
- Assess service delivery priorities
- Review program options
- Prioritize program plans to meet identified needs; and
- Develop and/or revisit strategic plans to respond to any new federal or state regulations or initiatives.

Highlights/Summary of Significant Changes/Concerns

Demographics:

Fairfax County remains diverse with 182 languages or dialects spoken in homes of elementary students. Currently, FCPS, the local school system, has the 8th largest English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program in the nation. A significant contributor to income disparity in Fairfax County is limited English proficiency—those individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. English proficiency remains a pre-requisite for successful educational and professional advancement. Research indicates that weak proficiency is linked to limitations in educational outcomes, workforce participation, earnings, economic mobility, and family resources. In addition, there are many families who are not literate in their home language. When program staff do not speak the same language, it is difficult to determine this. Many programs require forms and provide written materials to explain processes and educate parents and continue to have a challenge finding translators who meet the program's and/or families' language needs. In the past five years, Fairfax County Head Start has seen a decrease in the enrollment of children from Spanish-speaking families (48% in 2015 to 43% in 2020). In general, there are more languages represented in the various programs. Since Higher Horizons and Greater Mt. Vernon programs are housed in specific neighborhoods, they have seen the most demographic change over these past 5 years. Details are included below.

English Proficiency, Adult Literacy, and Disparities:

While the percent of population in Fairfax County who speak English less than well has been consistent since 2016, the rate in Fairfax County remains over twice as high as the rest of Virginia, and overall higher than the U.S. A significant contributor to income disparity in Fairfax County is limited English proficiency—those individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

Preschool Availability:

Over the past several years, additional slots for four-year-olds have become available through Virginia Preschool Initiative, through community providers. During the 2020 legislative sessions, Virginia lawmakers focused on significantly expanding preschool programs, to include serving three-year-olds. This law passed in March 2020. Fairfax County Head Start anticipates a very large shift in programming, including the coordination of recruitment and enrollment processes.

Affordable Housing:

Housing continues to be challenging for families with low-income. Many families simply cannot afford to live and work in Fairfax County. Revitalization efforts in the last few years in Alexandria and Bailey's Crossroads areas have displaced many families, particularly a large apartment complex in Culmore. The renovated building is designated "affordable," but many Head Start eligible families do not earn enough to be self-sufficient even in lower rent apartments. Homeless shelters are increasingly assisting families with finding housing outside of the county.

Lack of Transportation:

Transportation also continues to be a challenge. Within the county, there are more options for transportation, such as Uber and Lyft, and commuter lots for ride sharing. Though this may seem promising, the reality is that Head Start eligible families cannot afford these options. Additionally, the buses and ride sharing opportunities are focused on getting commuters into and out of Washington, DC. This does not help families who need to travel distances within the county, for example from Alexandria to Reston. There remain few options to assist families in obtaining their own vehicle.



Concerns Regarding Immigration Status:

Increasingly, people whose immigration status is not secure do not want to become known to agencies. Coordinated Service Planning (CSP), the county's "front door" to the human service system, confirms that some clients are not willing to share information and apply for programs because of this fear. Because of this, there are children not receiving early intervention services, WIC, and other program benefits.

Office for Children Departmental Change from DFS to NCS:

The Office for Children (OFC) was previously under the county's Department of Family Services (DFS). On July 1, 2019, OFC was transitioned to the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS). This change was made to better align the continuum of services for children within the county's Health and Human Services system. There is no change to services being provided to children and families. Services offered are still designed to advance the care, education and healthy development of children from birth through elementary school.

Prior to this transition, NCS had approximately 250 full time employees. OFC has over 1,000 employees who transitioned to NCS. With an increase of NCS four times its employment workforce, there has been a focus on aligning the policies and procedures of OFC with NCS. In addition, some of the benefits of OFC transferring to NCS include the ability to provide a continuum of quality, affordable, equitable child and youth development programs and services for children birth to age 21 that supports children, families and communities thriving and promoting opportunities for shared facilities. Shared facilities include the Providence Community Center/School Age Child Care; Gum Springs and Bailey's Community Centers/Head Start.

Opioid Crisis:

In Fairfax County, there were 114 opioid-related deaths in 2017. While the count appears to be down for 2018, the proportion of overall deaths that include fentanyl is increasing and is higher in Fairfax County compared to all of the other reporting counties in Virginia. Fentanyl accounted for 62% of all drug deaths in Fairfax County in 2017, compared to 50% in Virginia.

Population Shift

While the population growth has remained consistent, there continue to be shifts geographically within the county. Between 2010 and 2019, the county's population growth was reflective of overall urbanization, transportation, and general economic and market patterns throughout the county. However, between 2019 and 2029, population growth is expected to be more directed in the northern portion of the county due to the extension of Metro's Silver Line and commercial and residential growth along the Route 28 corridor. Additionally, with the arrival of Amazon's second headquarters (HQ2) in Arlington County, employees will be dispersed throughout the region. Fairfax County is expected to gain approximately 24,558 households due to Amazon's headquarters.

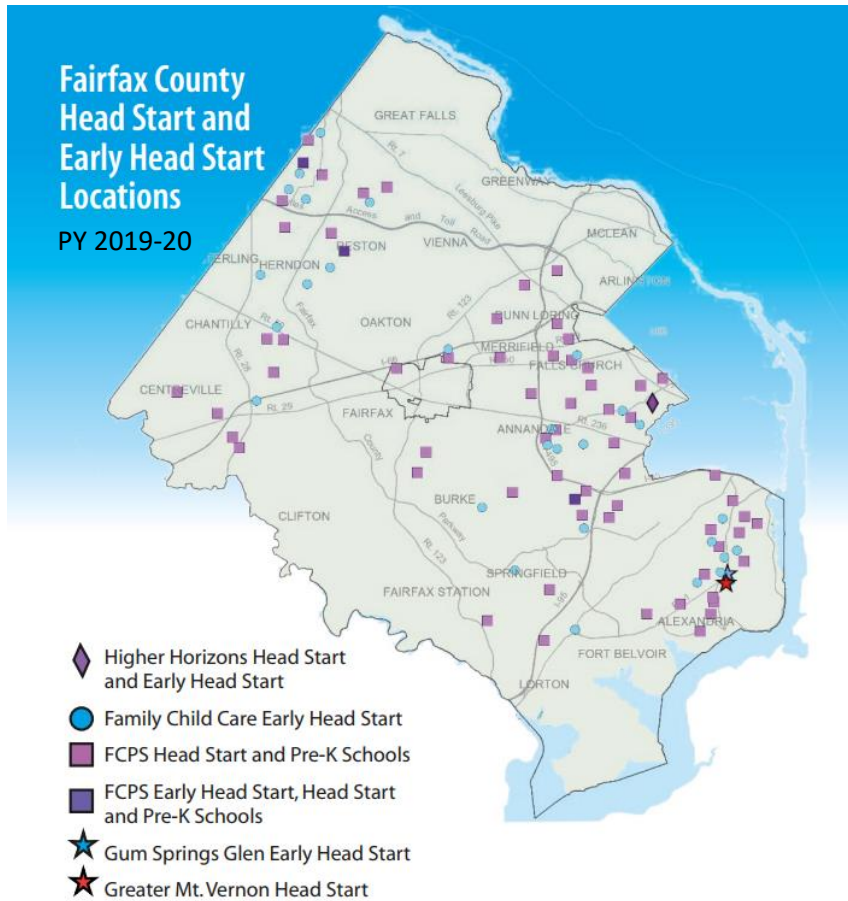
FCPS Site Location Adjustments

Because Fairfax County Public Schools has Head Start/Pre-K classrooms in 63 out of 149 elementary schools, the Pre-K program reviews their enrollment on an annual basis to assess the “base schools” of all children enrolled. Due to availability of facilities and transportation system logistics, two changes will be coming in program year 2020-21. The classroom at Poplar Tree Elementary is moving to Greenbriar East Elementary (less than 2 miles away). One classroom from Woodlawn Elementary will be moving to Ft. Belvoir Elementary, adding a second classroom there.

Fairfax County Office for Children Head Start and Early Head Start Program

The Fairfax County Office for Children Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) Program provides services at Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start in Alexandria, Higher Horizons Day Care Center, Inc. in Bailey's Crossroads, Fairfax County Public Schools and family child care homes throughout the county.

The program is funded with federal, state and local dollars for 2,336 children in program options that include a) center based (children are in a classroom setting), b) home based (services are provided by a home visitor in the family's home), and c) family child care (children are cared for by a county-permitted and/or state-licensed provider in the provider's home). Children in Fairfax County Public Schools' Head Start program attend a school year program. All other options are year-round.



The program composition is as follows:

Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start and Family Child Care (25 providers)

- 180 Early Head Start (132 in family child care, 48 in center-based).
- 158 Head Start.

Higher Horizons Day Care Center, Inc.

- 52 Early Head Start (16 center-based and 36 home-based).
- 172 Head Start.

Fairfax County Public Schools

- 48 Early Head Start (center-based).
- 1,726 Head Start/Pre-K.



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