

**United Children’s Services of Bennington County  
Bennington County Head Start  
Bennington County Early Head Start  
Self-Assessment Report 2021-2022**

<b>I. Introduction</b>
a. Briefly describe your program (745 characters)
<p>United Children's Services of Bennington County is recognized as a 5STAR program at all locations for high quality early childhood education by the Vermont Agency of Human Services and in addition to federal regulations. The program enrolls 121 preschool slots with its Head Start Grant and 48 infant and toddler slots with its Early Head Start- Child Care Partnership Grant annually, at licensed centers and partners in Pownal, Bennington, North Bennington, and Manchester. This year, the program is working to consolidate the two grants. The program operates with three licensed centers of its own, and five partnerships in total, and employs on average 60 staff. The program and all of its partners, except one school, were open providing onsite programming this year, with limited virtual options for a small number of families that were not ready to return to onsite programming yet.</p>
b. Provide a context for your Self-Assessment process (870 characters)
<p>The Head Start/ Early Head Start management team comprises the Self-Assessment Team along with parents, Policy Council, UCH Board, Staff, and community partners’ input. Data sources are reviewed in each content area. Each manager writes their own strengths, areas of improvement, and determines progress toward the Five-Year Goals in the grants. Staff provide input to the Self-Assessment at the SOAR analysis of the program and the Appreciative Inquiry session held this year, where each content area manager presented data then organizing questions for staff review, analyzation, and input. Further, we completed the Center for the Study of Social Policy Strengthening Families Self-Assessment booklets, covering the Five Protective Factors areas, as a complement and to look deeper at systems and supports. Three Self-Assessment meetings were held in the summer June to August (beginning, midpoint, and end) for analyzing data, reporting out to other content areas, and in the writing of the report.</p>
<b>II. Methodology</b>
a. Describe the design of your Self-Assessment and identify the members (1,500 characters)
<p>           BCHS Annual Self-Assessment Team; Summer 2021:            Betsy Rathbun-Gunn, Director            Rebecca Bishop, Assistant Director            Tonya Havens, Head Start Education Manager            Kim Lawlor-Batty, Early Head Start Manager            Grace Winslow, Head Start Health Manager            Beth Wallace, Family and Community Partnerships Manager            Judith Lamoureaux, Disabilities- Mental Health Coordinator         </p>

Cindy Randall, Operations Coordinator  
Lisa Biddle, Transportation Supervisor  
Allyson Gerrity, Early Head Start Health Case Manager  
Jennifer Rodriguez, Northshire Head Start Coordinator- FSW

b. Provide the Self-Assessment time frame (1,465 characters)

Ongoing monitoring and continuous Quality Improvement cycled through the school year. The initial Self-Assessment meeting was held in June. The midpoint team meeting, where findings to date and other data to review was held in July. The final team meeting was held in August 2021, where each member discussed their findings and recommendations to the improvement plan. Community Partner and Policy Council recommendations were further discussed. The Assistant Director trained the new Disabilities and Mental Health Coordinator in June, since they are both new to the program within the last year. The Self-Assessment overview and training modules posted on the ECLKC were used. The Policy Council and Governing Board were advised of the process, included in surveys, discussion about findings and their input, and recommendations for goals and program improvements monthly over the summer meetings, and final reports and results discussed and approved at their respective meetings on September 13 and 14, 2021. Community Partners were surveyed in July and August 2021. Staff provided input in August 2021. The Operations Coordinator interviewed a wide variety of staff from every content area, including management and direct staff from June to August 2021 and completed the CSSP Self- Assessment booklets for more information.

<p>c. List the data collection tools used (730 characters)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Readiness goals and child outcomes TSG data for all children: Fall 2020, Winter 2021, Spring 2021; for EHS children also Summer 2021</li> <li>• PIR Report 2019</li> <li>• PIR data collection 2021</li> <li>• Child Plus data reports 2020-2021</li> <li>• UCH Annual Report 2020</li> <li>• Family Services Outcomes based on Florida Family Assessment Tool, two cycles</li> <li>• DECA Outcomes, Fall 2020, Winter 2021, Spring 2021</li> <li>• Staff IPDPs in BFIS Fall 2020</li> <li>• Community Partner survey, Survey Monkey 2021</li> <li>• Coaching participant interview, June 2021</li> <li>• BCHS-EHS Family Feedback survey, Survey Monkey, Summer 2021</li> <li>• Kindergarten Readiness Survey 2018</li> <li>• CLASS national scores, OHS 2020</li> <li>• BCHS-EHS Community Assessment 2019</li> <li>• UCS Employee Satisfaction Survey 2021</li> <li>• Disabilities and screening data 2020-2021</li> <li>• Policy Council Interviews and feedback/ updates: June, July, August 2021</li> </ul>
<p>d. List any additional information used during Self-Assessment (965 characters)</p>
<p>Results of the three meetings for Self-Assessment  Strengthening Families program Self-Assessment booklets (CSSP)  ECLKC Self-Assessment modules for training</p>
<p><b>III. Key Insights</b></p>
<p>a. Describe the strengths of the program (965 characters)</p>
<p><b>COVID-19 Supports to Children, families, staff, and the community</b> must be the key strength indicated of the program for the second year. The current school year provided onsite programming to almost all children enrolled four days per week, and Virtual programming one day per week. Virtual Wednesdays allowed the program to provide additional cleaning and sanitizing to environments mid-week as well as follow the schedule set forth by our largest LEA, the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU). The SVSU did not reopen to full capacity for all children until April 2021 and continued an asynchronous learning day on Wednesdays for the full school year. With a large number of staff with young children enrolled at SVSU, the program did not have enough staff available for work to support onsite learning on this day, making a Virtual Learning Day a good option for all. The program used a virtual platform to provide synchronous learning activities, that were also posted for families to view at a later time if they could not join. The program sent home activity supplies to complete the work, once a month a new book to build family libraries and to engage in literacy activities, along with two meals and snack for the day. The FSW Team continue to support families in areas of resource and referral that were identified needs, particularly around meals and housing supports. This program was a hub for the county for Everyone Eats meal vouchers, with over 600 meals distributed, as well as when the program changed to local area restaurant meals provided, the FSW team helped by picking up meals and delivering to families in need. The Ready Rosie parenting curriculum tool continued to enroll over 80% of families in regular usage. As a school year funded grantee, the Head Start program has always operated a separate tuition and state-subsidy funded summer program for preschoolers. Many families qualify for 100% full time Child Care Financial Assistance in Vermont. For those that do not, families often choose to enroll in a part-time slot or not attend for summer services. Due to the children’s needs shown by the 2020-2021 School Readiness data, we were able to identify which areas showed the greatest lost of learning, particularly for the four-year-olds transitioning to Kindergarten this year, Fall</p>

2021. Through COVID19 federal funds, we were able to ensure a full-time summer slot to these children that do not qualify for 100% full-time subsidy, to ensure there would be no further lost of learning, and targeted learning objectives to increase progress, particularly around Literacy, Approaches to Learning, and Social and Emotional Development, before the Kindergarten transition.

**Onsite Education programs for both children and staff** continues to be a strength of the program in many ways. Education and promotion of staff from within is embraced. There are 2 staff enrolled in the TEACH program for an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education, 3 staff enrolled in Northern VT University ECE BA program with licensure (2 of these graduated this year, and 1 of these also earned her VT Agency of Education teaching license), 3 staff enrolled in a graduate program for a Master of Education degree, 1 staff completed her CCV Assessment of Prior Learning portfolio course for EC credits toward an AA degree, 2 staff earned Infant Toddler CDAs with two more applied and pending their verification visit for a new Infant Toddler CDA. Practice Based Coaching continued to support staff this year with a variety of onsite and virtual supports to improve the delivery of services. Due to COVID19, while partner education staff completed the Needs Assessment for Coaching, partner program directors did not allow their staff to engage in Coaching, both due to crossover of center staff to help reduce the spread, as well as, and chiefly due to a lack of coverage at the partner sites in all classrooms. Child Outcomes and School Readiness Goals showed very low data points at all checkpoints this year, compared to other years pre-pandemic. Despite low beginnings, children continued to make large amounts of progress in each domain area of learning over the year as evidenced in each checkpoint data report. The group of children that still showed a great need for improvement are the four-year-olds transitioning to Kindergarten in Fall 2021, as the group most greatly impacted by the pandemic and virtual learning experiences from at least March to June 2020 for most, and March to September 2020 for some. Research is being conducted on a world-wide level and we still will not know the effects and the amount of time it will take for these children to close the gap of this lost learning time.

**Disability supports** increased to children, families, partners, and staff this year. Our new Mental- Health Disabilities Coordinator is very well-connected to Children's Integrated Services – Early Intervention (CIS-EI) as well as the Early Education Program (EEP) providing IEP services at the LEA. Disability rates continued to grow this year to about 25% of Head Start preschoolers and 48% of EHS Infants and Toddlers over the year. The Disabilities Coordinator has further documented the complexity of needs of children increasing. One example of this is, medical diagnosis of children, with adaptive equipment needs. In addition to working with partner providers and securing equipment for the classroom, helping to secure equipment for the home, as well as coordinating trainings for both the family and the staff together to help support the needs of the child.

**Opening the Spring Center** after completing construction during a pandemic, with the shutdown of the project due to Governor Scott's Stay Home Stay Safe orders in 2020, to COVID19 impacts on the construction staff and contractors, to shipping issues with key construction and equipment items. The opening fulfilled the decade-long goal of the UCH Board to create a downtown childcare facility, in the heart of the largest town in Bennington County, where families could walk to programs, and multiple uses of the facility to promote early childhood education, as well as nutrition, health, Farm to School, and family opportunities and experiences. The site is open, providing care to two classrooms of preschoolers, and two of the three classrooms are open to infants and toddlers. The third classroom will be open once qualified staffing can be hired. The opening also creates the opportunity to diversify programming and enrollment, by creating an additional eleven infant toddler slots here, and nine more at the North Bennington campus, due to the moving of one preschool classroom to Spring. Classrooms are diversified enrollment with OHS funded and non-OHS funded slots and are reflected in HSES as well as in the Business office, with a newly updated Cost Allocation Plan for income and expenses and appropriate

GAAP.

b. Describe systemic issues (1,085 characters)

**Staffing** is one of the greatest challenges of the last year. Due to staff turnover, there has been a challenge of filling our available openings with qualified applicants. The turnover for ECS division is higher than that of the full UCS grantee agency combined. There are staff vacancies to be filled for the following positions: Head Start Teacher Assistant, Early Head Start Co-Teacher, Bus Monitor/ Floater Teacher Assistant, Bus Driver/ Floater Teacher Assistant, Substitute Teacher Assistant, Family Outreach Clinician, and EHS Coach. Staff have left positions during the pandemic to go work for the public schools and to leave the field of early childhood education as the most reasons given. There are three positions that have been open for one year and UCS has just put into place a hiring bonus for difficult to fill positions, as well as increased the minimum pay for essential positions to \$15.36 per hour as a base to attract and retain qualified staff that work directly with children and families.

**Pownal location building needs** must become a priority in the coming school year and is supported by both the Policy Council and the Governing Board. The program is currently housed in a modular building on the public-school grounds, over twenty years old, and with a twenty-year old lifespan. There are many maintenance and repair needs now, necessitating the cost of replacement over the extent of the repairs needed, and due to the priority of a health and safe environment for children, families, and staff.

**COVID impacts to health services** Due to COVID19, UCH was unable to offer tooth brushing or fluoride applications for the children during the school day. The program did send home dental supplies and educational materials for families to use at home. Some virtual curriculum focused on oral health. The Farm to School program was impacted due to COVID19 and they were unable to come into the classroom and make meals together and taste-test food. Explorers Club and Cooking Club were not able to be offered this year due to COVID. Fewer children received dental exams and required health exams and follow-up due to COVID19 restrictions. Policy Council has recommended a family service Connecting the Dots meeting about oral health in Bennington County next year.

**Mental Health and Disabilities have been a challenge and a goal for improvement in the coming year.** Our mental health and disabilities rates have increased to 50% of EHS and 25% of Head Start enrollment. Providing services in a consistent manner with local providers could be a challenge some weeks of the pandemic this year. There were frequent changes if school could allow their provider staff to go to sites, and if they would offer services virtually. Virtual services with preschoolers in itself was a challenge in a classroom during the regular program day. The Bennington community and Building Bright Futures Council opted to not continue with the community DECA slots for infants through preschoolers in 2021, so this program will make a shift to train and use the ASQ-SE online along with the ASQ for screening in the coming year. The Family Mental Health Outreach clinician position has been vacant for one year with no qualified applications which has reduced our capacity to provide onsite mental health support at all sites and partners this year.

**Transportation** Due to COVID restrictions UCH has had to limit our number of children on the bus to one child per seat unless they are living in the same household. There has been a 14-month vacancy for the bus driver and bus monitor positions. The bus continues to need work mechanically as well. Even with two busses and one driver, there were a small number of days when both busses were in the shop for repairs this year, and a bus replacement should be a priority in the next year or two.

**Partnerships** with other childcare providers were impacted due to COVID19. Program staff met with several school and licensed centers in the last year and provided information and ideas about what creative partnerships to support the center and the enrolled children and families could look like. All potential new partners declined due to COVID19, the unknown of the future, and not wanting to start anything new in such a time of uncertainty. After 20 years MPCC has ended their partnership with UCH due to COVID19 and not wanting to follow HSPPS anymore with such increased regulations from the VT Child Development Division at the same time. Manchester Elementary Middle School paused their partnership last year, due to not wanting to allow any outside partner staff onsite due to the threat of the spread of the virus.

c. Discuss the progress of the program in meeting its goals and objectives (1,085 characters)

**Goal 1: By 2026, UCH will develop and implement an approach to individualization and transition that addresses implicit bias and recognizes the uniqueness of every child and family served by UCH.**

UCH has participated in small-group discussions on implicit biases after watching “I Am From Here”, a film on racial biases in Vermont. UCH participated in the training “Disrupting Implicit Bias in Early Childhood Education Programs” to learn strategies to reduce implicit bias and explore stressful situations in the early childhood environment that are most likely to be influenced by implicit bias. All UCH staff watched “Downstream”, a documentary highlighting the effects on children by parental incarceration and participated in a training following the documentary. UCH continues to work with UCS’s Equity and Inclusion Committee to strategize ways of staff engagement in addressing implicit bias within UCH.

**Goal 2: By 2026, UCH will create, maintain, and strengthen partnerships with community agencies and with the families we serve, in order to best support our clients and ensure the sustainability of the Head Start/EHS program.**

UCH involves parents and community members in being an active part of Policy Council. UCH staff actively participated in a Family Engagement training to brainstorm ways to involve family members throughout the school year and beyond. Members of the UCH management team regularly meet with current partners to foster the relationship.

**Goal 3: By 2026, UCH will have established an organizational culture that elevates staff knowledge and expertise in service to children and families.**

UCH was able to increase the minimum pay in order to recruit and retain knowledgeable staff. UCH staff regularly engage in ongoing professional development training to further their knowledge and expertise within the early childhood field. Selected UCH staff participate in coaching from a approved, research based coaching model, over the course of the year to strengthen their knowledge and skills.

**IV. Recommendations**

a. Recommend areas for program improvement (735 characters)

A separate document is attached: Program Improvement Plan 2021-2022