

United Children’s Services of Bennington County

Bennington County Head Start

Bennington County Early Head Start

Self-Assessment Report 2023-2024

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| **I. Introduction** |
| a. Briefly describe your program (745 characters) |
| 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 is funded to enroll 97 preschool slots with its Head Start Grant and 54 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, under one consolidated grant pending approval of a change of scope. The program operates with three licensed centers of its own, and four active partnerships in total, down from six partnerships, and employs on average 70 staff, in the catchment area of Bennington County. |
| b. Provide a context for your Self-Assessment process (870 characters) |
| 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 coordinator or 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 in June, where each content area manager and three coordinators presented data then organizing questions for staff review, analyzation, and input.  Further, a team of five staff 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 writing the report |
| **II. Methodology** |
| a. Describe the design of your Self-Assessment and identify the members (1,500 characters) |
| BCHS Annual Self-Assessment Team; May to August 2024:  Rebecca Bishop Ware, Director  Kimberly Lawlor-Batty, Assistant Director  Tonya Havens, Head Start Education Manager  Grace Winslow, Head Start Health Manager  April Dunham, Family and Community Partnership Manager  Joselyn Boyd, Disabilities, Mental Health and Disabilities Manager  Cindy Randall, Operations Manger  Lisa Biddle, Transportation Supervisor  Allyson Gerrity, Health Coordinator  Stephanie Eames, Community Partnership Coordinator |
| 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 Team 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 2024, where each member discussed their findings and recommendations to the improvement plan. Community Partner and Policy Council recommendations were further discussed. 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 in July and August 2024. Staff provided input in June. Five direct service staff interviewed a wide variety of staff from every content area, including management and other direct service staff in May and June 2024 led by the Operations Manager, and completed the CSSP Self- Assessment booklets for more information. |

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| c. List the data collection tools used (730 characters) |
| * School Readiness goals and child outcomes TSG data for all children: Fall 2023, Winter 2023, Spring 2023 & 2024; for EHS children also Summer 2024 * PIR Report 2023 * PIR data collection 2024 * Child Plus data reports 2023-2024 * UCH Annual Report 2023 & report data collection 2024 * Family Services Outcomes based on Florida Family Assessment Tool * Staff IPDPs in BFIS 2023-2024 * BCHS-EHS Family Feedback survey, Microsoft Survey, Spring-Summer 2024 * Kindergarten Readiness Survey 2023 * CLASS national scores, OHS 2023 * BCHS-EHS Community Assessment 2019, and annual updates 2020-2024 * UCS Employee Satisfaction Survey 2023 * Disabilities and screening data 2023-2024 * Policy Council Interviews and feedback/ updates: June, July, August 2024 |
| d. List any additional information used during Self-Assessment (965 characters) |
| Results of the three meetings for Self-Assessment  Strengthening Families program Self-Assessment booklets (CSSP)  ECLKC Self-Assessment modules and templates for training |
| **III. Key Insights** |
| a. Describe the strengths of the program (965 characters) |
| **Staffing/Filling Openings**  Two new Behavior Interventionist positions were created and filled bringing three Behavior Interventionist to support the program. Three site supervisor positions were created and filled (two internal applicants and one external applicant) to support Spring, West, and Park. Seven new floater positions were created bringing eight Floater Teacher Assistants, and two Bus Monitor/Floater Teacher Assistants to support the program. Other positions that were filled include Director, Assistant Director, Family and Community Partnership Manager, one Lead Teacher, eight Co Teachers, Teacher Assistants, Bus Driver/Floater, Family Support Worker, and Substitute Teacher Assistants.  **Professional Development**  Professional Development of all staff continues to be a strength for the program. Trainings covered over the past year include Knee High training, Conscious Discipline trainings, CLASS training, QCIT training, Four Winds Nature training, DECA for Adults, Language Literacy training, Bus Monitor training, Health and Safety training, ALICE training, Nurturing Healthy Sexual Development training, CACFP training, FA2 Monitoring training, TSGold training, ELOF training, Safe Sleep training, CPI training, and Adult and Pediatric First Aid/AED/CPR/Stop the Bleed training.  **Less turnover and Astron** Education and promotion of staff from within is embraced. Two successful open interviews were held with two staff members being hired as a result. One staff earned a BA degree, one staff member earned an AA degree, two staff earned a CDA. One staff member is enrolled in a BA program, four staff are enrolled in an AA program at CCV, three staff are enrolled in a CDA program, and three staff are enrolled in TEACH. Two staff completed Director Level I credentials. One Family Services staff completed the Family Services Credential program. Practice Based Coaching continued to support nine staff with three coaches providing coaching to staff chosen from the Coaching Needs Assessment. Since the Astron market rate adjustments, staff turnover has decreased. Ten staff members benefited from tuition and books from training funds.  **Education and Transition Services**  CLASS observations were completed twice for the Head Start classrooms and partners including one set of observations for the federal review with a passing score. Four staff members are certified with the CLASS Observation Tool. Transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten continue to be a challenge as SVSU only holds transition meetings for children with IEPs.  Observation and assessment training continues to be a priority as classroom assessments were not consistent with what was observed in the classrooms. Staff are trained in and will continue profession development on TSGold, CSFEL, Conscious Discipline, and EMTSS. The Head Start classrooms in North Bennington, Spring, and Pownal participated in the Vermont Arts Exchange. North Bennington and Spring took trips to the library and the YMCA for swimming following licensing swim plans and ratios and the aquatic plan. The two-year-old EHS room participated in visits to the McCullough Library. Planning out timing and transportation for all Head Start classrooms to attend swimming will be looked at for this coming year.  **Internal transition procedures**  The new internal transition procedure for children was classroom to classroom and from EHS to HS was followed over the school year. This gave children more time to spend preparing for the transition and visiting their new classrooms and teachers. More notice of transitions is needed to complete the internal transition procedure to fidelity.  **Disability** **supports** continued to be high for children, families, partners, and staff this year. Our Mental- Health Disabilities Manager 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 36% of Head Start preschoolers and 56% of Early Head Start Infants and Toddlers over the year. The Disabilities Manager has further documented the complexity of the 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 training for both the family and the staff together to help support the needs of the child. UCH acquired a Vermont Child Development Division Special Accommodations Grant for a child with special needs to have one-on-one support for 25 hours per week. Partnerships with SVSU and EI for educational support team meetings, referrals, and IEP meetings are strong. Referrals from EI to LEARN (ABA services) have increased support for 8 children with more children on the list. Family support workers and Mental Health and Disabilities Manager meet monthly to continue to help strengthen parent advocacy for children with disabilities on their caseload. Staff provide classroom accommodation and modify curriculum to adapt for children with disabilities. There has been 100 % attendance from all families at IEP kindergarten transition meetings. IFSP to IEP transition meetings have been well attended by families. There is an increased rate of children that transition from Early Intervention onto an IEP. The program continues to improve staff knowledge through professional development for more complex needs of children particularly with autism. Many children with IFSPs and IEPs receive multiple services increasing the number of providers in the room at a time and the need for collaboration.  **Transportation**  Family Support and Health staff offer some limited transportation to medical and dental appointments if families are struggling to make other modes of transport work for them. Bus and pedestrian safety is done at registration with all parents regardless of if their child will ride the bus. All information is entered into Child Plus accordingly. Classrooms also utilize curriculum throughout the year to reinforce the importance of pedestrian safety in all settings, as well as in and around school buses. Three EHS children were transported by bus. All three buses continue to need mechanical work. The program plans to purchase a replacement bus in the 2024 school year.  **Health:** There were more hearing and screening passes due to children staying home when not feeling well, therefore it was seen that children are hearing better in the data. The numbers of IHPs and meal modifications have not changed, but inhalers are up from a few years ago-there are fewer sick children and a need for inhalers. All children were screened within the first 45 days of the start of the year. EHS continues to have a strong collaboration with Early Intervention for screenings and exchanging of information and communication is strong. |
| b. Describe systemic issues (1,085 characters) |
| **Staff Qualifications** is one of the greatest challenges of the last four years. Due to staff turnover, there has been a challenge of filling our available openings with qualified applicants. When a position turns over, we are no longer able to enjoy interviewing multiple qualified applicants and finding the best fit for the program. We now wait and see if there will be any applicants, and which ones might be viable due to on-the-job training and program support with higher education opportunities as they seem to have positive professional dispositions to support their learning the job. There are staff vacancies to be filled for the following positions: Co Teacher, Teacher Assistant, Floater Teacher Assistant, and Bus Monitor/Floater Teacher Assistant. In Head Start, four three assistants currently have a CDA, one is working towards their CDA, and four are working towards their AA degrees. Two Head Start lead teachers have licenses, one has a BA degree and is working on their license, two are working towards their BA degrees, and one is working on their AA degree. Three EHS Co Teachers have a BA degree, one has an AA degree, one is working on their BA degree, four are working on their AA degree, and four have a CDA. There are 13 current Head Start parents on staff.  **Engagement**  The Welcome Week at the beginning of the school year gave families an opportunity to engage with staff and each other. A Welcome Week is planned for this upcoming school year in September.  Parent committees are established but struggle with attendance and will be a focus in the upcoming school year. Partners will be included in the parent committee this upcoming year. Playground meetups will include the entire community this year and not just families with children transitioning from Head Start to kindergarten. There have been several family events planned at pickup time, with this time showing an increase in participation. The events have included herb planting, pumpkin painting, cooking club, explorers club. The bus and vans have taken home activities that are paired with education such as the Harvest of the Month and gross motor activities. These activities are connected to School Readiness goals. The past year has had a good jump in increasing engagement following the pandemic and we will look for more opportunities to increase engagement this year. The caseloads of the FSWs are lower but the needs of the families are more than resources and referrals. FSWs are utilized for registrations, classroom coverage, pre-k needs, and CCFAP.  **Enrollment and Partnerships**  We supplied family bags to bring curriculum into the home. Northshire Day School partnered with us through the year but will not continue their partnership for the 24/25 school year. The model partnerships followed was two meetings per month. Our Oak Hill partner is experiencing unqualified staff and high turnover. It is difficult to have Oak Hill attend our professional development due to coverage at their site and not closing. Our contracts with partners have changed with required documents to ensure regulations are fulfilled. Targeted enrollment recruitment has included community events and community locations that our families shop at. Our attendance was highest in September, May, and June. January is our lowest month for attendance. We hosted a Health Bash in the month of January to increase attendance. Chronic absences continue to impact attendance. Robust community engagement/recruitment events held throughout the year including instant enrollment events, canvassing throughout Bennington, North Bennington and Pownal at both residences and local businesses. Participation in Healthy Kids Day, Sunrise Family events, Gay Pride parade, North Bennington Block Party, multiple Truck or Treats, Winterfest, etc. New recruitment materials including yard signs, post cards, etc. Post cards mailed to identified income eligible neighborhoods.  **Mental Health Services, and transition** is a need this year due to the high number of children and families with Mental Health needs this year. DECA shows progression/degression over the course of the year and captures a more accurate picture of development. Other ways that mental health services can be improved include communication with classrooms and mental health services provider, and more support services beyond the mental health clinician observation to partnerships, both in the northern and southern areas of our county, which has further suffered due to staffing vacancies. To help increase staff mental health support we will continue to use Invest EAP. Staff have struggled with challenging behaviors. We are looking for opportunities in the upcoming year to provide opportunities to discuss social and emotional issues in a racial and cultural context with our families. The DLLPA group is still meeting, and literacy audits have been completed. We have used interpreter services and translated materials in the classroom and materials that go home to families.  Many mental health providers are not accepting new patients, making wait lists long and delaying delivery of services. This is still an after effect from the pandemic.  **Building and Safety needs**  The Park and West centers need accessibility ramps. Building inspections of the interior and exterior of Park include chronic issues with the siding, windows, mold, and elevators.  The Pownal site was completed in August and the school year will begins September. The program has expanded to include an EHS classroom with 8 infant and toddler slots.  Playground and safety checks have shown environmental concerns at the Park and Spring site.  Lock down and lock out drills have been conducted with evacuation as a first choice in drills using ALICE. Data has been used to inform decision making in drills. After expanding emergency training to include ALICE skills last year, all buildings have needs for safety and security based on individual assessment, and including items such as reunification kits, go bags, and increased first aid kits. Other items needed include general repair and maintenance including roofing and painting.  **Dental Services**:  Lack of dental providers (especially practices that accept VT Medicaid) makes it hard for families to maintain up to date dental care and to access treatment in a timely manner. One of the main practices willing to see children under 3 has substantially downsized and no longer offering treatment. Families must travel over an hour for dental treatment currently. |
| 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.**  The ASQ has been utilized for goals. Child placement and accommodation are done with complex needs in mind. Staff attended a milestone disability training and an ASQ training. A parent series is planned with the EHS Manager and Mental Health and Disabilities Manager for the upcoming year. The Benning Community Kindergarten Transition summit will be attended by the Head Start Education Manager.  **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 the Policy Council. UCH staff actively participated in Strengths Opportunities Aspirations Results (SOAR) training where Family Engagement opportunities were brainstormed 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. UCH partners with dental and health care providers and that relationship is fostered by our Health Coordinator. UCH has developed a partner handbook. UCH continues to discuss partnership with Fisher Elementary School. Contracts with partners have changed to include bimonthly meetings in person and virtual, with quarterly cross cover.  **Goal 3: By 2026, UCH will have established an organizational culture that elevates staff knowledge and expertise in service to children and families.**  UCH has increased the minimum pay 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. Astron market rate adjustments provided salary increases for most staff. UCH has supported staff in continuing their education by funding college courses and textbooks. Selected UCH staff participated in coaching from an 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 2023-2024 |